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HISTORY

OF

The Norsemen's Visits to Rhode Island and Mass. in the Tenth Century.

BY

Professor E. Fales.

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PREFACE.

The history of the Norsemen's Visits to our shores in the Tenth Century, has been one of much study and expense to the author. Meeting with many requests from those who were interested in the subject, it was thought best to publish it. The idea is to delineate the facts contained in the interpretation of what has only been called "New England Legends." This work will be followed by others of interest in American Antiquity. Much criticism has been made that has proved encouraging. An editor desirous of hearing the subject furnished printing and advertising gratis. It is hoped the readers will be pleased

CHAPTER I.

HOW DO WE KNOW.

Many questions arises to the why and wherefore of a thing that is spoken of, especially if it is a subject knowledge is wanted upon. These queries are of a natural impulse, and is in the channel of a true order of things. One that naturally arises is "Who were the Norsemen?" to answer this question, the chapter following will answer it. Another is "How do we know they came here?" Some years after the voyages were made, an Icelandic Bishop, who seemed somewhat ambitious, and desirous that they should be kept in some way, that the voyagers should have their place in history, recorded these accounts to writing. There were eighteen of these manuscripts, mostly Icelandic.

A society was formed at Copenhagen in Norway, called the Royal Society of Northern Antiquity, whose object was to make researches into the historical doings of their ancestry. To this society, of which, Prof. Rafn was a member, to whom we are indebted for a translation of these manuscripts. Old Kronos or Father Time seemed to have preserved these manuscripts and had them fall into the hands of this society. They spoke of a country in the west. An Atlas (the mythological god of grecian theology who was supposed to have borne the world on his shoulders) was examined, a country in the west was found, situated near the meridan spoken of, supposed to be America, as no other land corresponded to it. Having substantiated their suppositions by proofs spoken of in them, finally had conclusive evidence of their ideas.

They appeared in book-form nearly half a century ago at one of our colleges, creating much interest among the students a finely printed volume upon the same subject. Columbus, it is said, had five sources from which he gleaned information of

the subject. The Norsemen being one of them, in that case he is not entitled to all the credit given him.

Higginson, in his history of our country, in writing of them says "If it was not for the memorials found along our shores and not for their legends we would never know they ever came here."

These will be shown further along in this book.

CHAPTER II.

THE NORSEMEN.

This race that came upon English soil were called Normans in Irish history they are called Vikings. Having a corruption of the word Norman into Norsemen, I think that the name Northmen might be applied to them coming from Greenland. William, the Conqueror, was a Norman, and heads the list of the crowned heads of Britain.

They were a race who were brave, daring, energetic and intelligent, lovers of freedom and liberty. Being a branch of the Teutonic race, that existed in the centre of Asia. Probably from some domestic feud emigrated northward and westward, till they came to that land now called Norway and Sweden. Roman geographers of that day supposed it to be an archipelago or cluster of islands.

Here they turned their attention to an existence to be derived from the soil in agricultural pursuits. Proving to themselves that the land was not fertile enough and the climate too cold, gave their attention to that great element, the ocean, as it lay before them.

Navigation was looked into. They built their ships from the best of oak, with high forecastles and sterns, so to encounter the storms and billows of the northern ocean.

Their bows the head of a dragon, the stern representing the tail, while the oars were for the propelling force of the craft representing fangs. The poet remarks

Their bark, the dragon of the wave.

These vessels if espied from the coast in the distance, might cause the observer to think he had caught a glimpse of the sea serpent.

In these vessels they made piratical voyages to different countries, having a liking to discover lands and sail unknown seas. Among their discoveries was Iceland in the 8th century, Greenland in the 9th, and America in the 10.

They endured a hardihood in which they have not been surpassed by any nation, ranking second with the Roman in fame.

Sailing along the European coast gained many victories. The French king who witnessed them entering his harbor from his palace window, shed tears knowing it was no use to prevent their approach. Normandy, the better part of France, was wrestled from him.

After this the Gibraltar straits were turned, and sailing up the Mediterranean gained victories at Sicily and Greece, and the Italian coast. They at one time gave laws from the thrones of Constantinople and Jerusalem.

The voyages that I shall comment on are five in number, four performed by brothers, and the other undertaken by a wealthy nobleman named Thorfinn Karsefne.

CHAPTER III.

BAIRNE DISCOVERY.

In the year 986, a Norwegian named Biarne, who was a commercial trader engaged in commerce between Norway and Iceland. He had returned from a voyage to Norway, became in-

formed that his father had emigrated to Greenland. Resolving to spend the winter with his father as he had the previous ones

Obtaining consent of his crew, composed of thirty-five able-bodied men, and without discharging cargo, set sail for Greenland, though neither his men or himself had ever sailed the Greenland sea.

His vessel after a few days' sail made land; but it did not correspond to the Greenland coast. It was mountainous and woody, to which they gave the land the name of Markland. The Icelandic word "Mark" meaning wood.

Putting to sea once more, and after another two days' sail, again made land, but this time it was low and barren. It was given the name of Helluland, from the Icelandic word "Helli," meaning rock or barren.

Not going ashore, set sail again, and after three days' sail, made the Greenland coast.

Arriving ashore they made known the news of their discovery, which formed the chief topic of conversation for some time in Groenland. He was censured much for not exploring more of the new land.

CHAPTER IV.

LEIF'S EXPLORATION.

In the year 1002, Bairne paid a visit to the Earl of Normandy, and censured by him for not exploring more of the new land.

Leif, who was brother of Biarne, and a second son of Eric the Red of Greenland, borrowed his brother's ship, for a voyage to the new land. He felt that the new country had been to little explored, became determined to examine it for himself.

They touched at Helluland and Markland, but made no stops; They continued their course southward, till they came to a promintory, said to be Nantucket, around which they sailed.

Their course was pursued westward to where a river emptied into the sea, from a lake, (Mt. Hope Bay, a party going to Fall River by rail and looking south will see that Mt. Hope Bay has the appearance of being a lake).

Landing on what was known as the Codman's farm, opposite to Fall River. Going ashore, pitched their tents on the green grass, and brought their cots from the ship.

A council was held by them, and resolving to stay some length of time, a house was erected, and called in honor of their leader Leif's Budir or Booth.

The company was divided into two parties, one to keep watch at the house, while the other was away to explore the surrounding country; going no farther than being able to return the same night.

One night as the party returned, the German, named Tyrker, was missing. Tyrker was a favorite of Leif, who had grown up with him from childhood; felt anxious about him.

Getting twelve volunteers from the company, started out in in search for him. He was found by them munching grapes. Holding up a bunch in his hand, exclaimed: "Weintrauben! Weintrauben!" doing nothing but munching grapes, talking German and then laughing.

Here is a case of intoxication from the fruit of the vine. His friends were enabled to get him to the camp, without his meeting further trouble.

The Norsemen were ignorant of the discovery of the new fruit, as it was unknown to them. Coming more to himself he made known to them his exploits.

Not far from the supposed settlement, a swamp is still to be seen with many vines loaded with grapes in the fall season.

From this incident Leif named the surrounding country "Vineland."

They busied themselves in filling the ship with timber, and the long-boat with grapes, to return with to Greenland.

Reviewing these facts, we can see that the credit lies with the party of eight men sent southward in the ship's long boat on a tour of exploration. We notice that the tower has eight pillars, corresponding to the number of men in the party. It seemed to have been erected as a place of refuge, from the attacks of wild animals, and in case of a besiegment from the natives, from the so-called windows were port-holes through which their weapons could be pointed at the enemy.

After their return in the fall, having spent the summer, crossed the "lake" to where Fall River now stands. Landing and espying a high promontory his men ran to the top of it. There were discovered three canoes with the same number of natives in each. A skirmish ensued between them, in which eight of the nine natives were killed, the other making good his escape.

Soon he appeared with a large number of natives in canoes. The Norsemen were obliged to board their vessel. Battle-screens were raised on the ship's sides to protect themselves. In spite of their efforts an arrow wounded Thorwald under the arm. Finding that his wound would prove fatal, advised his men to return home.

"But first," said their leader, "carry me to the promontory I thought was so beautiful, and there bury me. Place a cross at my head, another at my feet. and ever-after call the place 'Kroskanes'."

His men spent the winter at Leif's Booth, returning the following spring to Greenland.

SKELETON

In 1831 during an excavation being made on Pocasset street, Fall River, for the erection of a cotton mill, the workmen came across what seemed to be a skeleton in armor. The periodicals of that time criticised the discovery much, and wondered what it was? The poet even asks the object to speak, and tell who he was. It was kept in the Fall River Athenæum till 1843 when it was destroyed by fire. It must have been the skeleton of Thorvald, who had received the poisoned arrow under the arm. Barzelius, the Swedish Chemist, analyzed a part of the armor and found it corresponded to that worn in the middle century.

CHAPTER VI.

THORSTEIN'S VOYAGE.

Thorstein Erickson, a son of Eric the Red, and the last of the four brothers, in the year 1005, with an able-bodied crew of twenty-five men, with his wife Druida, set sail in his brother's vessel. His intention was to proceed to Vineland and bring back the body of his brother Thorwald.

They were tossed on the waves all summer, finally reaching Greenland in the fall.

This voyage proved unsuccessful.

CHAPTER VII.

THORFINN KARSEFNE PURPOSE.

In 1827, the last voyage of which I shall speak, was undertaken by Thorfinn Karsefne. Being a wealthy nobleman born of illustrious lineage—Irish, Scotch and Norwegian ancestry.

At the festival of Yule or Christmas, Thorfinn was urged by his wife and encouraged by friends to make a voyage to the new land. He equipped a fleet of three vessels, of which he took command. A company of 151 persons, including seven women and the necessary domestic animals set sail.

Helluland and Markland was touched by them, but continued on their course southward. Passing the northern portion of Cape Cod, to which they gave the name of Kialnes, (signifying Keel Cape). Stopping at the southern part of the cape, it was given the name of Furdustrand, from the numerous sandhills. Indian's name was Nauset.

Two Scottish slaves, named Take and Tekia, given Thorfinn by the Norse king, were put on shore and told to go in a south-west direction and explore the country. After three days they returned with bunches of grapes and ears of wild wheat, giving an excellent report of the country.

NOTE.—Owing to certain circumstances the Author was compelled to change the publishers of this work at a time when it was most inconvenient and the pamphlet but half finished. But the change was a most fortunate one, as the typographical appearance of the latter portion will bear witness.

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