

# RURAL RETREAT TIMES.

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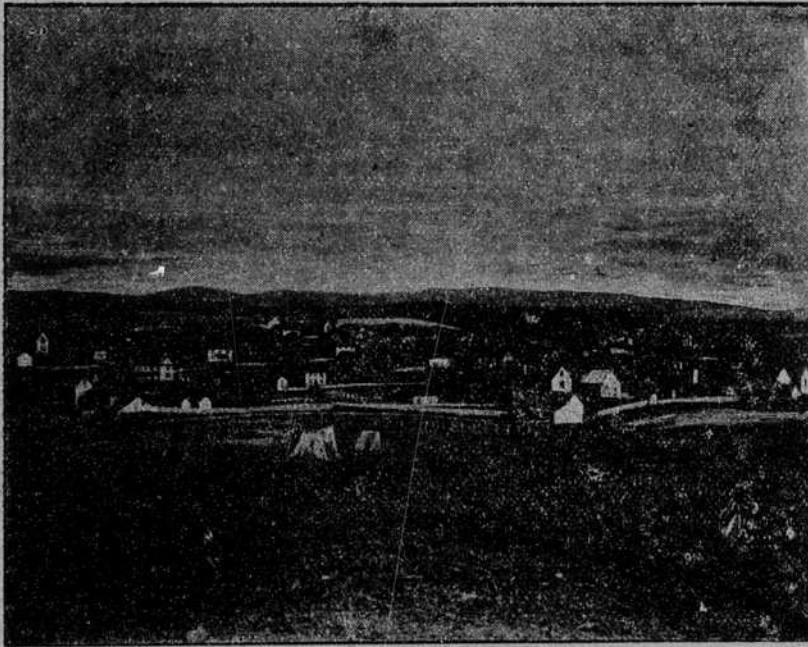
NO. 43.

## OUR TOWN.

BY W. H. PEPPER.

**R**URAL RETREAT, located in the extreme western end of Wythe county and the highest point on the Norfolk and Western Railroad from Norfolk to New Orleans, is a town of no mean proportions. The volume of its business is astonishing, but when you travel over the fertile and productive lands that surround her, you can readily see the reason for her prosperity and grand possibilities. We shall but briefly touch upon the past of our town, for we are in the present, fighting and struggling for a brighter future.

The first postoffice of the name was



some two miles northeast of our town in the home of Dr. Jno. Straw, the first postmaster. This was in the days of the stage coach and that was a relay station and many bright and amusing stories could be told in connection with that old hestlery.

Time dragged its slow length along and our State was traversed by the now Norfolk and Western Railroad. What is now Rural Retreat was then called Mt. Airy and known by that name until General Mahone, in his palmy days, had it changed to Rural Retreat. 'Twas then a mere hamlet with here and there a farm house and the only way to get from one to the other, through the woodlands filled with underbrush, was by keeping to the paths made by the milch cows as they passed to and fro from the barns to the spots where grew the choicest herbage.

Years passed by bringing their joys and complement of sorrows. The sons of these sturdy farmers grew to men; schools were more abundant and they learned that life was larger and brighter than it had ever appeared to their fathers. Each succeeding year brought more enlightenment and to so energetic a people as ours giving them knowledge was like putting the best of tools in the hands of skilled mechanics. What they did and are doing, is simply marvelous. Much, we think, is also due to the influence of the grand old mountains that are about us and who lift their heads high above the smaller hills and low lying valleys that surround them. Our people, living in their very midst, breath in from infancy their grandeur and sublimity. In early youth they become imbued with the idea of loftiness

and stability and you will find the imprint of these qualities of our mountains stamped on their very souls. Not all of the peaks of our mountains are equally beautiful and symmetrical; so with our people. Some are rich in mental attainments and those finer graces of the soul, making beautifully rounded characters, whilst others, like the rugged cliffs, are devoid of all beauty and challenge your admiration simply from their uncouthness and desperation.

So much for the mountains. How we love them. Drifting you say? Well, here's back to facts and figures.

Our place grew from a hamlet to a village and then to its present proportions in rapid succession and is now first feeling the glow of manhood and touched

with the desire to do and be something. Our town now numbers nearly 800 and we have the busiest people under the sun as inhabitants. We know of but one habitual loafer. Our business men have no time for idleness and the man of many and long winded stories does not thrive here. He cannot often find an audience; so from lack of congenial souls, he and the incorrigible loafer heave a sigh and move on.

We would not convey the idea that our people are inhospitable or unsocial; far from it. They throw their whole being into their work and when it is time for entertaining and being entertained they are equally as active. We are not a passive people, but active—terribly so. If you are that kind of a man we want you and you will be at home here, otherwise you will be as miserable as a lost soul gazing into paradise.

Our county is rich in anything. Farming lands in their virgin freshness, timbers, minerals, metals—all are here in the greatest abundance only awaiting fuller development. Much has been done in that line. Yet greater things are in store for Wythe. We have the same formation as underlies the famous blue grass region of Kentucky and all cereals do well here. Where can you find such a county; such a people?

The goddess Ceres, could have wished for no more desirable spot than this. The choicest blue grass is found everywhere, on our mountains, as well as in our valleys. Farming is the chief occupation of our people and to judge from the many handsome country houses that are around Rural Retreat is proof sufficient that they do not labor in vain, but find a lucrative business in tilling so

productive a soil. Horses, sheep, hogs and cattle are not neglected, but are all of a high breed. One big advantage we have is that our farms are small and well cultivated and the output is not all consumed by the expenses, therefore the grazing of stock is not such a feature with us as in some of our adjoining counties.

The cut we give of our town does not do it justice. Our location is such that it is well nigh impossible to show her in a picture as she is. We are a long town, yet gradually but rapidly filling up and that, too, with a desirable people and first class grade of buildings.

The position from which the view is taken is southwest and looking northeast. The conformation of the ground here is such that we, while on the summit, are still surrounded by hills and our best buildings and business part of the town cannot be shown in a single cut. To the east and west of this view are some of the finest houses we have. The west, like all towns, has improved more rapidly than the east and the buildings erected are of a high grade. We regret that we cannot show every one for they are homes that are beautiful and homelike and are true exponents of the spirit of a fine and cultured people.

Due to the wisdom and foresight of Mr. Solomon Buck, who owned nearly all the land adjacent to the station, small bits of land were not easily secured and we have him to thank for the scarcity of cabins and unsightly buildings that so often mar the beauty of other towns. Property has been and is so high here, that a man who cannot build a good house, cannot find a place to put up a shanty and we have not that class of people to contend with. All here are self-supporting and progressive.

We have no drones or dreamers. As we said before, a man who can and will not work is unknown in Rural Retreat save for the one exception, and he fills



his appointed place in God's creation; he shows what idleness yields.

We have more first class houses for our size than any town in this section that has not been afflicted with a boom and not one vacant house in the place. Ours has been a steady growth and will continue. 'Tis not spasmodic, but regular and the same causes still exist.

Before we close we must say a word for our negro friends—not to curry

favor, but because they honestly deserve it.

About three-quarters of mile west by south and the same distance west by north are villages of negroes. They, in most cases, own their homes and are honest and prosperous as any of their race. Better behaved, more intelligent and honest negroes are not to be found than those who make their homes around Rural Retreat. Sober and industrious, they dress well and have comfortable and, in many instances, attractive homes. Their children are well clothed and fed and are not seen in squalor and rags, objects to excite pity in the sympathetic heart or contempt in the callous, but bright, busy, little beings with a brighter future before them.

Our town is almost entirely free from the liquor traffic and is proverbial for its good order and quietness. Longfellow, in his "Evangeline," depicted just such a place and people as ours save for the spirit of freedom and self-reliance that we get from our mountains.

We have no factories or furnaces in our immediate vicinity that are in active operation at present. Mining is in its infancy and just beginning to stir itself. About four miles north of the town has just been opened up a coal mine and the output is about thirty tons per day and can easily be increased to three times that amount. They are getting out a fine grade of white ash coal and the vein is about twelve foot and exceptionally free from slate and other foreign matter. In the mountains to the south of us whose peaks stand out like bold sentinels along our southern border is found a high grade of iron ore and has, until the late depression in the iron market, been worked to advantage by the Lobdell Car Wheel Company, of Wilmington, Del., and has been used to the best advantage in the manufacture of their celebrated car wheels.

If you are in search of a home Rural Retreat throws wide her gates and bids you cast in your lot with us. For

climate, soil and water our county is specially noted and many are the visitors to this delightful section during the heated term.

As we advance let us cling with all the tenacity possible to the virtues of the grand old men who have preceded us; and shun their vices, ever remembering that the more perfect the picture so much bolder stands out the slightest blemish.