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The Oregon Trail

Condensed from FRANCIS PARKMAN

By
Sarah Katherine Grames

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43 Story of the Mayflower—*McCabe*
45 Boyhood of Washington—*Reiter*
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172 Child's Garden of Verses—*Stevenson*
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Fables and Myths

46 Puss in Boots and Cinderella—*Reiter*
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49 Buds, Stems and Fruits—*Mayne*
51 Story of Flax—*Mayne*
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135 Little People of the Hills (Dry Air and Dry Soil Plants)—*Chase*
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138 Aunt Martha's Corner Cupboard—Part III. Story of Rice, Currants and Honey

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68 Stories of the Revolution—I (Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys)
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71 Selections from Hiawatha (For 3rd, 4th and 5th Grades)
167 Famous Artists, I—Landseer and Bonheur.

Literature

67 Story of Robinson Crusoe—*Bush*
72 Bow-Wow and Mew-Mew—*Craik*
233 Poems Worth Knowing—Book I Primary

FOURTH YEAR

Nature

75 Story of Coal—*McKane*
76 Story of Wheat—*Halifax*
77 Story of Cotton—*Brown*
78 Stories of the Backwoods—*Reiter*
134 Conquests of Little Plant People—*Chase*
136 Peeps into Bird Nooks, I—*McFee*
181 Stories of the Stars—*McFee*
205 Eyes and No Eyes and the Three Giants

Continued on third cover

INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES

The Oregon Trail

BEING SKETCHES OF PRAIRIE AND ROCKY MOUNTAIN LIFE

By Francis Parkman

RETOLD AND ABRIDGED BY
SARAH KATHERINE GRAMES, PH.B.

PUBLISHED JOINTLY BY
F. A. OWEN CO., DANSVILLE, N. Y.
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INTRODUCTION

Francis Parkman was born in Boston, September 16, 1823. He was of English ancestry, and on his mother's side could trace his descent from John Cotton. He was graduated from Harvard College in 1844; for the next two years he was a student at the Harvard Law School, but he never practiced.

The journey which forms the subject of the *Oregon Trail* was made immediately upon the completion of his law studies.

In order to understand its significance, it is necessary to recall the geography of the country in 1846. The western boundary of the United States was still the western limit of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, namely, the summit or watershed of the Rocky Mountains. The northern boundary, the forty-ninth parallel, as far as the Rockies, had been fixed by treaty with Great Britain only as late as 1842; while the treaty of 1846, extending the same line westward and confirming the claim of the United States to Oregon, was not signed until June 15, at which time Parkman and his companions were on their way. War with Mexico, which was to carry the boundary of the United States to the Pacific, was declared on May 13 of the same year.

North and west of Missouri and Iowa, none of the states which now occupy this great region had yet been formed. The Territory of Wisconsin, organized in 1836, included within its limits most of the country between the Great Lakes and the Missouri River, north of Iowa; and Iowa had been admitted as a state only about a year before Parkman's journey began.

Parkman's journey occupied about five months. Leaving Boston in April, 1846, in company with a relative, Quincy Adams Shaw, he went first to St. Louis, the trip by railroad, steamboat, and stage requiring about two weeks. Here they secured the services of two guides and procured their outfit, including in the latter a supply of presents for the Indians. Eight days on a river steamboat brought them to Independence, where the land journey really began. From this rough frontier town their route took them first to Fort Leavenworth, the principal military post on the Missouri River, and thence by the Big Blue and Platte rivers to Fort Laramie. Here Shaw, who was ill, remained, while Parkman, who greatly desired to see the Indian at war, pushed on until he overtook a party of Ogillallahs bound for the Black Hills to hunt buffalo, and, it was thought, almost certain to be attacked by hostile Arapahoes or Crows. To venture thus upon an expedition in which he risked his life, and at a time, too, when he was himself so ill as hardly to be able to ride his horse, testifies to extraordinary courage and strength of will.

Fortunately there was no fighting, although there was adventure in abundance. Returning in safety to Laramie, the party went south through Colorado, passing Pike's Peak, to a point near the Mexican border, where they met United States volunteers bound for the seat of war. Thence they continued northeastward to Independence, by steamboat to St. Louis, and back to Boston.

The Oregon Trail

A five months' trip to the northwest coast of the United States and back again! Quincy A. Shaw and Francis Parkman made such a journey during the year 1846. The trip necessarily meant hardships, fatigue, and danger, for the territory covered by the Oregon Trail was entirely uncivilized. It was inhabited by most savage Indian tribes. Nevertheless, great bands of settlers were moving westward, their covered emigrant wagons dotting the prairies. Many of the emigrants, especially those bound for California, were persons of wealth and standing. The hotels of St. Louis were crowded, and the gunsmiths and saddlers were kept constantly at work in providing arms and equipments for the different parties of travelers. Almost every day steamboats were leaving the levee and passing up the Missouri, crowded with passengers on their way to the frontier.

Of all the hundreds of people who turned toward "Oregon" during that time, there were probably no other men who did so for reasons so unusual as did Shaw and Parkman. Shaw hoped to shake off the effects of a disorder that had impaired a constitution originally hardy and robust; and Parkman was anxious to pursue some inquiries relative to the character and usages of the remote Indian nations, being already familiar with many of the border tribes.

The first rendezvous was Westport, Kansas. The town was full of Indians, whose little shaggy ponies were tied by dozens along the houses and fences. Sacs and Foxes, with shaved heads and painted faces, Shawanoes and Delawares, fluttering in calico frocks and turbans, Wyan-

dottes dressed like white men, and a few wretched Kansas wrapped in blankets, were strolling about the streets, or lounging in and out of the shops and houses.

Because of the dangers of traveling, it was necessary that the two have camp followers. So they chose Henry Chatillon, a Frenchman, for guide and hunter, and Delorier, a Canadian, for muleteer. Four men with eight animals composed the original party.

Delorier was a Canadian, with all the characteristics of the true Jean Baptiste. Neither fatigue. exposure, nor hard labor could ever impair his cheerfulness and gayety, and when night came he would sit down by the fire, smoke his pipe, and tell stories with the utmost contentment. In fact, the prairie was his congenial element. Henry Chatillon was of a different stamp. He was born in a little French town near St Louis, and from the age of fifteen years had been constantly in the neighborhood of the Rocky Mountains, employed for the most part by a company to supply their forts with buffalo meat. His age was about thirty, he was six feet high, and very powerfully and gracefully moulded. The prairies had been his school; he could neither read nor write, but he had a natural refinement and delicacy of mind. Henry was content to take things as he found them; and his chief fault arose from an excess of easy generosity. His bravery was as much celebrated in the mountains as his skill in hunting; but it was characteristic of him that, in a country where the rifle was the chief arbiter between man and man, Henry was very seldom involved in quarrels. Once or twice, indeed, his quiet goodnature had been presumed upon, but the consequences of the error were so formidable that no one repeated it.

After seven or eight days of preparation everything was ready. Parkman rode in advance. His outfit had been provided with a view to use rather than ornament.

It consisted of a plain, black Spanish saddle, with holsters of heavy pistols, a blanket rolled up behind it, and the trail rope attached to his horse's neck hanging coiled in front. He carried a rifle of some fifteen pounds' weight.

Henry Chatillon was mounted on a hardy gray Wyandotte pony. He wore a white blanket-coat, a broad hat of felt, moccasins, and pantaloons of deerskin, ornamented along the seams with rows of long fringes. His knife was stuck in his belt; his bullet-pouch and powder-horn hung at his side, and his rifle lay before him, resting against the high pommel of his saddle, which, like all his equipments, had seen hard service, and was much the worse for wear.

Then rode Shaw, mounted on a little sorrel horse and leading a larger animal by a rope. His outfit resembled Parkman's except that he carried a double-barreled smooth-bore. Each was attired in a red flannel shirt, belted around the waist like a frock; moccasins had supplanted failing boots; and the remaining essential portion of attire consisted of an extraordinary article, manufactured by a squaw out of smoked buckskin.

Delorier, the muleteer, brought up the rear with his cart, wading ankle-deep in the mud, alternately puffing at his pipe, and ejaculating in his prairie patois: "Sacre enfant de garce!"* as one of the mules would seem to recoil before some abyss of unusual profundity. The cart had a white covering to protect the articles within. These consisted of ammunition, blankets, and presents for the Indians.

They filed slowly toward the prairies! Thunder storms drenched them to the skin. The shaft mules balked, reared and plunged. Carts stuck hub-deep in mud. Horses ran away. But undismayed they journeyed on!

* *Sacre enfant de garce:* A French curse that when translated loses its force.

They reached the prairie and had their first conference with an Indian—an old Kansas and a man of distinction, judging from his garments. His head was shaved and painted red, and from the tuft of hair remaining on the crown dangled several eagle's feathers, and the tails of two or three rattlesnakes. His cheeks, too, were daubed with vermilion; his ears were adorned with green glass pendants; a collar of grizzly bears' claws surrounded his neck, and several large necklaces of wampum hung on his breast.

The party decided to spend one day at Fort Leavenworth and then bid farewell to the frontier or, as the saying is, "jump off." Five or six miles beyond this fort is the Kickapoo village, and as the party rode along they could enjoy strange scenery. On the left stretched the prairie, rising into swells and undulations, thickly sprinkled with groves, or gracefully expanding into wide grassy basins of miles in extent; while its curvatures, swelling against the horizon, were often surmounted by lines of sunny woods; a scene to which the freshness of the season and the peculiar mellowness of the atmosphere gave additional softness. Below, on the right, was a tract of ragged and broken woods. They could look down on the summits of the trees, some living and some dead; some erect, others leaning at every angle, and others still piled in masses together by the passage of a hurricane. Beyond their extreme verge, the turbid waters of the Missouri were discernible through the boughs, rolling powerfully along at the foot of the woody declivities on its farther bank.

The path soon after led inland; and as they crossed an open meadow they saw a cluster of buildings on a rising ground before them, with a crowd of people surrounding them. They were the storehouse, cottage, and stables of the Kickapoo trader's establishment. Just at that mo-

ment, as it chanced, he was beset with half the Indians of the settlement. They had tied their wretched, neglected little ponies by dozens along the fences and outhouses, and were either lounging about the place, or crowding into the trading house. Here were faces of various colors; red, green, white, and black, curiously intermingled and disposed over the visage in a variety of patterns. Calico shirts, red and blue blankets, brass earrings, wampum necklaces, appeared in profusion. The trader was a blue-eyed, open-faced man, who neither in his manners nor his appearance betrayed any of the roughness of the frontier; though just at present he was obliged to keep a lynx eye on his suspicious customers, who, men and women, were climbing on his counter, and seating themselves among his boxes and bales.

The next stop for our friends was at Fort Laramie, a distance many miles from Fort Leavenworth and reached only after more than a month's hard travel. Fort Laramie was one of the posts established by the American Fur Company who monopolized the Indian fur trade of that whole region. The scenes there were like some picture of olden times, with numerous Indians and squaws, forming a picturesque and interesting feature.

You will remember Parkman's reason for going West —"to pursue some inquiries relative to the character and usages of Indians." Needless to say, since neither the ideas nor the manners of the Indians were in the slightest degree modified by contact with civilization; since their religion, superstitions, and their prejudices were the same that had been handed down to them from immemorial times; since they fought with the same weapons their fathers had fought with and wore the same rude garments of skins, he found much of interest. Not the least interesting of all these observations was the old method of setting up camp. It was their ever-followed

idea to set the lodges in a circle, in the center of which crackled a cheery camp-fire.

Let us approach a hunting camp and enter one of the close and heated lodges. Do you see that smoke-dimmed, circular settlement? That is a village. Can you not distinguish those long brown festoons strung from lodge to lodge? Those are the strings of buffalo meat that the squaws have cut into thin sheets that they may dry in the sun. But here come several savages to meet us and we must let them know that we are friendly. Now the ceremony of shaking hands must be gone through. They are glad to see us, for they ejaculate the friendly "How! how! how!" a monosyllable by which an Indian contrives to express half of the emotions of which he is susceptible. Now that we are in the village you can see the lodges are, for the most part, large and neat. Shall we look into one tent? Or if you can bear the choking smoke, enter. There, wedged close together, is a circle of stout warriors passing the pipe around, joking, telling stories and making merry after their fashion. And here come the usual number of bronze-colored boys and snake-eyed girls. What is it they are saying? "Come and eat!" Unless we offend our entertainers, we must cast aside desire and follow the messengers to their respective lodges.

Parkman is giving a feast in Big Crow's lodge and we will hurry there. We will sit on the ground near the opening and see what happens. Here come two men carrying two huge kettles of what we know must be beetle-soup or dog meat! These they place in the center of the lodge and we can tell by the first whiff that it is dog meat. One by one the guests enter and silently seat themselves in a close circle. Each warrior is carrying a wooden bowl. When all are assembled, the meat is distributed by two Indians who are careful to give a double

portion to old men and chiefs. How quickly all that dog meat has disappeared! With what speed each guest has turned his bowl upside down to show that it is all gone! Here comes some bread. And now the two distributers are pouring black looking tea into the wooden bowls. While the owner of the lodge cuts up his tobacco and shongsasha, the company silently fill up pipes and pass them from hand to hand.

Now, if we have survived our share of the feast, we may sit back and listen to the speeches. Parkman, with great solemnity, speaks of his long journey and of the white men beyond the Mississippi. Oft repeated "How! how! how!" interrupts from time to time. As he speaks of presents he has brought, his camp follower distributes tobacco to the delighted savages. We will be bored to listen to all the speeches that follow so let's steal quietly away. But what is that weird sound? An old chief walking about the village singing his song in praise of the feast. If we linger awhile we shall see the horses brought in from the plains to be picketed before the dwellings of their respective masters. But we will go away now for we must be back at daybreak if we wish to see the tribe break up camp.

It is daybreak. One by one the lodges are sinking down in rapid succession, and where the great circle of the village had been only a moment before, nothing now remains but a ring of horses and Indians, crowded in confusion together. The ruins of the lodges are spread over the ground, together with kettles, stone mallets, great ladles of horn, buffalo robes, and cases of painted hide, filled with dried meat. Squaws bustle about in their busy preparations, the old hags screaming to one another at the stretch of their leathern lungs. The shaggy horses are patiently standing while lodge poles are lashed to their sides, and the baggage is piled upon

their backs. The dogs, with their tongues lolling out, lie lazily panting and waiting for the time of departure. Each warrior sits on the ground by the decaying embers of his fire, unmoved amid all the confusion, while he holds in his hand the long trail rope of his horse. As their preparations are completed each family moves off the ground. The crowd is rapidly melting away. They cross the river in quick succession along the profile of the hill on the farther bank. Let us follow them and see them encamped once more. A little farther on, in a very small meadow, set deeply among steep mountains, the whole village has encamped. The little spot is crowded with the confused and disorderly host. Some of the lodges are already completely prepared, or the squaws perhaps are busy in drawing the heavy coverings of skin over the bare poles. Others are as yet mere skeletons, while others still—poles, covering, and all—lie scattered in complete disorder on the ground among buffalo robes, bales of meat, domestic utensils, harness, and weapons. Squaws are screaming to one another, horses rearing and plunging, dogs yelping, eager to be disburdened of their loads, while the fluttering of feathers and the gleam of barbaric ornaments add liveliness to the scene. The small children run about amid the crowd, while many of the boys are scrambling among the overhanging rocks, and standing, with their little bows in their hands, looking down upon the restless throng. In contrast with the general confusion, a circle of old men and warriors sit in the midst, smoking in profound indifference and tranquillity. The disorder at length subsides. The horses are driven away to feed along the adjacent valley, and the camp assumes an air of listless repose. It is scarcely past noon; a vast white canopy of smoke from a burning forest to the eastward overhangs the place, and partially obscures the sun; yet the heat is

almost insupportable. The lodges stand crowded together without order in the narrow space. Each is a perfect hothouse, within which the lazy proprietor lies sleeping. The camp is silent as death. Nothing stirs except now and then an old woman passing from lodge to lodge. The girls and young men sit together in groups under the pine trees upon the surrounding heights. The dogs lie panting on the ground, too lazy even to growl at the white man.

Have you any idea in what way an Indian death is solemnized? Then come with me and we will attend a "funeral." A squaw has just died. The body, gaudily attired, is placed in a sitting posture in one of the lodges. Deep stillness prevails until suddenly the Indians raise, in concert, great cries of lamentation—a strange sound resembling "Hallelujah." Then stillness comes again. The lodge becomes silently crowded with Indians; a bright fire in the center is encircled with mourners in a triple row. A pipe is lighted and handed solemnly from one to another until a greater part of the night has passed. Fine presents are placed near the dead body; food and necessary implements are there for her use upon the long journey. An elegant horse prances outside the lodge, waiting to be killed that he may carry the spirit of the dead squaw to the villages of the dead. But we will not wait for the burial—not even long enough to determine what they select for a final resting place.

And with these funeral rites the mourning does not end. Year after year the relatives lament the loss—at times moaning out dismal wails; crying violently; gashing themselves with knives until they are covered with blood.

All the Indians think themselves bound to the constant performance of certain acts as the condition on which their success in life depends, whether in war, love,

hunting or any other employment. These medicines, as they call them, were usually communicated in dreams and are often absurd enough. Some Indians will strike the butt of the pipe against the ground every time they smoke; others will insist that everything they say shall be interpreted by contraries; others compel every white man they meet to drink a bowl of cold water. Kongra-Tonga, an old Ogillallah chief, raised up regularly every night at twelve o'clock and sang a long monotonous chant.

Another superstition that prevails is the fear to repeat legends. "It is a bad thing," an old Indian of eighty winters would say solemnly, "to tell the tales in summer. Our war parties are going out and our young men will be killed if I sit down to tell stories before the frost begins."

The Indians believe firmly in dreams. "We shall see strangers before night. I dreamed so," is a not uncommon thing to hear reported. Or "I cannot go to war, because one of my young men has had bad dreams. The spirits of the dead came and threw stones at him in his sleep."

You could not convince an Indian that the inferior animals lack intelligence and a power of understanding, for they think they are linked to them in close affinity. They even claim the honor of a lineal descent from bears, wolves, deer, and tortoises. Often times they consult the animals as to the plausibility of any plan. The black-and-green crickets they call by a name that signifies "They who point out the buffalo." Holding this insect respectfully between his thumb and finger, an old hunter will inquire, "Tell me, my father, where must we go tomorrow to find the buffalo?" If the cricket seems to point in any direction the inquirer will add in a satisfied way, "We will go that way in the morning and find plenty of game." Here is an incident to illus-

trate their treatment and opinion of dogs. In front of the lodge a squaw was standing, angrily scolding an old yellow dog, who lay on the ground with his nose resting between his paws, and his eyes turned sleepily up to her face, as if he were pretending to give respectful attention, but resolved to fall asleep as soon as it was all over.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said the old woman. "I have fed you well, and taken care of you ever since you were small and blind, and could only crawl about and squeal a little, instead of howling as you do now. When you grew old, I said you were a good dog. You were strong and gentle when the load was put on your back, and you never ran among the feet of the horses when we were all traveling together over the prairie. But you had a bad heart! Whenever a rabbit jumped out of the bushes, you were always the first to run after him and lead away all the other dogs behind you. You ought to have known that it was very dangerous to act so. When you had got far out on the prairie, and no one was near to help you, perhaps a wolf would jump out of the ravine; and then what could you do? You would certainly have been killed, for no dog can fight well with a load on his back. Only three days ago you ran off in that way, and turned over the bag of wooden pins with which I used to fasten up the front of the lodge. Look up there, and you will see that it is all flapping open. And now tonight you have stolen a great piece of fat meat which was roasting before the fire for my children. I tell you, you have a bad heart, and you must die!"

So saying, the squaw went into the lodge, and coming out with a large stone mallet, killed the unfortunate dog at one blow.

Did you ever hear of the "Thunder-fighters?" It was an Ogillallah organization that claimed the exclusive

power and privilege of fighting the thunder. Whenever a storm which they wished to avert was threatening, the thunder-fighters would take their bows and arrows, their guns, their magic drum, and a sort of whistle, made out of the wingbone of the war eagle. Thus equipped, they would run out and fire at the rising cloud, whooping, yelling, whistling, and beating their drum, to frighten it down again. One afternoon a heavy black cloud was coming up, and they repaired to the top of a hill, where they brought all their magic artillery into play against it. But the undaunted thunder, refusing to be terrified, kept moving straight onward, and darted out a bright flash which struck one of the party dead, as he was in the very act of shaking his long iron-pointed lance against it. The rest scattered and ran yelling in an ecstasy of superstitious terror back to their lodges.

The Great Spirit must be remembered and appeased continually. On the eve of the departure of a war party, the young men collect outside the encampment, singing, calling out and lauding the Great Spirit, that he may favor their undertaking. At regular intervals the warriors gash themselves with knives as an act of self-sacrifice to secure the Great Spirit's favor. Sometimes, instead of using knives the gashes are produced by running through the flesh strong splints of wood, to which ponderous buffalo skulls are fastened by cords of hide, and the wretch runs forward with all his strength, assisted by two companions, who take hold of each arm, until the flesh tears apart and the heavy loads are left behind. But it is not alone the Great Spirit that the Indian worships. Let us observe Old Mene-Seela communing. His face is turned upward, and his eyes seem riveted on a pine tree springing from a cleft in the precipice above. The crest of the pine is swaying to and fro in the wind, and its long limbs wave slowly up and down, as if the tree

has life. The old man is engaged in an act of worship or prayer, or communion of some kind with a supernatural being. Though the intellect of an Indian can embrace the idea of an all-wise, all-powerful Spirit, the supreme Ruler of the universe, yet his mind will not always ascend into communion with a being that seems to him so vast, remote, and incomprehensible; and when danger threatens, when his hopes are broken, when the black wing of sorrow overshadows him, he is prone to turn for relief to some inferior agency, less removed from the ordinary scope of his faculties. He has a guardian spirit, on whom he relies for succor and guidance. To him all nature is instinct with mystic influence. Among those mountains not a wild beast was prowling, a bird singing, or a leaf fluttering, that might not tend to direct his destiny or give warning of what was in store for him; and he watches the world of nature around him as the astrologer watches the stars. So closely is he linked with it that his guardian spirit, no unsubstantial creation of the fancy, is usually embodied in the form of some living thing—a bear, a wolf, an eagle, or a serpent; and Mene-Seela, as he gazes intently on the old pine tree, might believe it to inshrine the fancied guide and protector of his life.

The medicine-man—that worst of all imposters—has much power over the superstitious Indians. Dressed in gaudy garments, besmeared with paint, he thumps the diseased with both fists, howls, yelps and beats a drum close to the ear to expel evil spirits. When an Indian finds himself unable to be cured or is "attacked by some mysterious evil," the boldest of them falls prostrate at once. He believes that a bad spirit has taken possession of him, or that he is the victim of some charm. When suffering from a protracted disorder, an Indian will often abandon himself to his supposed destiny, pine away and

die, the victim of his own imagination. The same effect will often follow from a series of calamities, or a long run of ill success, and the sufferer has been known to ride into the midst of an enemy's camp, or attack a grizzly bear single-handed, to get rid of a life which he supposed to lie under the doom of misfortune.

A little incident taken from Indian hunting-camp life will throw light on the character and the customs of these men of the prairies. Characteristic names are given to the two warriors in question.

The Mad Wolf had taken a fancy to a fine horse belonging to another Indian, who was called the Tall Bear; and anxious to get the animal into his possession, he made the owner a present of another horse nearly equal in value. According to the customs of the Dakota, the acceptance of this gift involved a sort of obligation to make an equitable return; and the Tall Bear well understood that the other had in view the obtaining of his favorite buffalo horse. He however accepted the present without a word of thanks, and having picketed the horse before his lodge, he suffered day after day to pass without making the expected return. The Mad Wolf grew impatient and angry; and at last, seeing that his bounty was not likely to produce the desired return, he resolved to reclaim it. So this evening, as soon as the village was encamped, he went to the lodge of the Tall Bear, seized upon the horse that he had given him, and led him away. At this the Tall Bear broke into one of those fits of sullen rage not uncommon among the Indians. He ran up to the unfortunate horse, and gave him three mortal stabs with his knife. Quick as lightning the Mad Wolf drew his bow to its utmost tension, and held the arrow quivering close to the breast of his adversary. The Tall Bear, as the Indians who were near him said, stood with his bloody knife in his hand, facing the assailant

with the utmost calmness. Some of his friends and relatives, seeing his danger, ran hastily to his assistance. The remaining three Arrow-breakers, on the other hand, came to the aid of their associate. Many of their friends joined them, the war-cry was raised on a sudden, and the tumult became general.

The Indians are not only brave but cruel and relentless. An old Ogillallah chief told Parkman this story of cruelty. A party of young braves were scouting in the mountains. Here they found two Snake Indians, hunting. They shot one of them with arrows and chased the other up the side of the mountain till they surrounded him on a level place, and Kongra-Tonga himself, jumping forward among the trees, seized him by the arm. Two of his young men then ran up and held him fast while he scalped him alive. They then built a great fire, and cutting the tendons of their captive's wrists and feet, threw him in, and held him down with long poles until he was burnt to death. He garnished his story with a great many descriptive particulars much too revolting to mention. His features were remarkably mild and open, without the fierceness of expression common among these Indians; and as he detailed these devilish cruelties, he looked up with the same air of earnest simplicity which a little child would wear in relating to its mother some anecdote of its youthful experience.

If you have never heard prairie-dogs you will be glad to know how they live. Parkman says, "The number of prairie dogs was absolutely astounding. Frequently the hard and dry prairie would be thickly covered, for many miles together, with the little mounds which they make around the mouth of their burrows, and small squeaking voices yelping at us as we passed along. The noses of the inhabitants would be just visible at the mouth of their holes, but no sooner was their curiosity satisfied

than they would instantly vanish. Some of the bolder dogs—though in fact they are no dogs at all, but little marmots rather smaller than a rabbit—would sit yelping at us on the top of their mounds, jerking their tails emphatically with every shrill cry they uttered. As the danger drew nearer they would wheel about, toss their heels into the air, and dive in a twinkling down into their burrows. Toward sunset, and especially if rain were threatening, the whole community would make their appearance above ground. We would see them gathered in large knots around the burrow of some favorite citizen. There they would all sit erect, their tails spread out on the ground, and their paws hanging down before their white breasts, chattering and squeaking with the utmost vivacity upon some topic of common interest, while the proprietor of the burrow, with his head just visible on the top of his mound, would sit looking down with a complacent countenance on the enjoyment of his guests. Meanwhile, others would be running about from burrow to burrow, as if on some errand of the last importance to their subterranean commonwealth. The snakes are apparently the prairie dog's worst enemies, at least I think too well of the latter to suppose that they associate on friendly terms with these slimy intruders, who may be seen at all times basking among their holes, into which they always retreat when disturbed. Small owls, with wise and grave countenances, also make their abode with the prairie dogs, though on what terms they live together I could never ascertain. The manners and customs, the political and domestic economy of these little marmots is worthy of closer attention than one is able to give when pushing by forced marches through their country, with his thoughts engrossed by objects of greater moment."

And have you ever seen wolves? On the prairie three

different kinds were present; there were the white wolves and the gray wolves, both extremely large, and besides these the small prairie wolves, not much bigger than spaniels. They would howl and fight in a crowd around a single carcass, yet they are so watchful, and their senses so acute, that one is never able to crawl within a fair shooting distance; whenever it is attempted, they will all scatter at once and glide silently away through the tall grass. The air above the spot where wolves had been was always full of buzzards or black vultures; whenever the wolves left a carcass they would descend upon it, and cover it so densely that a rifle-bullet shot at random among the gormandizing crowd would generally strike down two or three of them. These birds would now be sailing by scores just above camp, their broad black wings seeming half transparent as they expanded them against the bright sky.

And now for buffalo hunting! First we must know about "how to catch buffalo" and then about how one buffalo was caught. As our party rode over the prairie with its coarse grass, its sand and its scorching sun, they found the country before them thronged with buffalo.

There are two methods of hunting commonly practiced, "running" and "approaching." The chase on horseback, which goes by the name of "running," is the more violent and dashing mode of the two. Indeed, of all American wild sports, this is the wildest. Once among the buffalo, the hunter, unless long use has made him familiar with the situation, dashes forward in utter recklessness and self-abandonment. He thinks of nothing, cares for nothing but the game; his mind is stimulated to the highest pitch, yet intensely concentrated on one object. In the midst of the flying herd, where the uproar and the dust are thickest, it never wavers for a moment; he drops the rein and abandons his horse to his furious

career; he levels his gun, the report sounds faint amid the thunder of the buffalo; and when his wounded enemy leaps in vain fury upon him, his heart thrills with a feeling like the fierce delight of the battlefield. A practiced and skillful hunter, well mounted, will sometimes kill five or six cows in a single chase, loading his gun again and again as his horse rushes through the tumult. An exploit like this is quite beyond the capacities of a novice. In attacking a small band of buffalo, or in separating a single animal from the herd and assailing it apart from the rest, there is less excitement and less danger. With a bold and well trained horse the hunter may ride so close to the buffalo that as they gallop side by side he may reach over and touch him with his hand; nor is there much danger in this as long as the buffalo's strength and breath continue unabated; but when he becomes tired and can no longer run at ease, when his tongue lolls out and foam flies from his jaws, then the hunter had better keep at a more respectful distance; the distressed brute may turn upon him at any instant; and especially at the moment when he fires his gun. The wounded buffalo springs at his enemy; the horse leaps violently aside; and then the hunter has need of a tenacious seat in the saddle, for if he is thrown to the ground there is no hope for him. When he sees his attack defeated the buffalo resumes his flight, but if the shot be well directed he soon stops; for a few moments he stands still, then totters and falls heavily upon the prairie.

The chief difficulty in running buffalo is that of loading the gun or pistol at full gallop. Many hunters for convenience's sake carry three or four bullets in the mouth; the powder is poured down the muzzle of the piece, the bullet dropped in after it, the stock struck hard upon the pommel of the saddle, and the work is done. The danger of this method is obvious. Should the blow

on the pommel fail to send the bullet home, or should the latter, in the act of aiming, start from its place and roll toward the muzzle, the gun would probably burst in discharging. Many a shattered hand and worse casualties besides have been the result of such an accident. To obviate it, some hunters make use of a ramrod, usually hung by a string from the neck, but this materially increases the difficulty of loading. The bows and arrows which the Indians use in running buffalo have many advantages over firearms, and even white men occasionally employ them.

The danger of the chase arises not so much from the onset of the wounded animal as from the nature of the ground which the hunter must ride over. The prairie does not always present a smooth, level, and uniform surface; very often it is broken with hills and hollows, intersected by ravines, and in the remoter parts studded by the stiff wild-sage bushes. The most formidable obstructions, however, are the burrows of wild animals, wolves, badgers, and particularly prairie dogs, with whose holes the ground for a very great extent is frequently honeycombed. In the blindness of the chase the hunter rushes over it, unconscious of danger; his horse, at full career, thrusts his leg deep into one of the burrows; the bone snaps, the rider is hurled forward to the ground and probably killed. Yet accidents in buffalo running happen less frequently than one would suppose; in the recklessness of the chase, the hunter enjoys all the impunity of a drunken man, and may ride in safety over the gullies and declivities where, should he attempt to pass in his sober senses, he would infallibly break his neck.

The method of "approaching," being practiced on foot, has many advantages over that of "running"; in the former, one neither breaks down his horse nor endangers

his own life; instead of yielding to excitement he must be cool, collected, and watchful; he must understand the buffalo, observe the features of the country and the course of the wind, and be well skilled, moreover, in using the rifle. The buffalo are strange animals; sometimes they are so stupid and infatuated that a man may walk up to them in full sight on the open prairie, and even shoot several of their number before the rest will think it necessary to retreat. Again at another moment, they will be so shy and wary that in order to approach them the utmost skill, experience, and judgment are necessary. Kit Carson, it is conceded, stands pre-eminent in running buffalo; in approaching, no man living can bear away the palm from Henry Chatillon.

The frequent stupidity and infatuation of the buffalo seems the more remarkable from the contrast it offers to their wildness and wariness at other times. Henry knew all their peculiarities; he had studied them as a scholar studies his books, and he derived quite as much pleasure from the occupation. The buffalo were a kind of companions to him, and, as he said, he never felt alone when they were about him. He took great pride in his skill in hunting. Henry was one of the most modest of men; yet, in the simplicity and frankness of his character, it was quite clear that he looked upon his pre-eminence in this respect as a thing too palpable and well established ever to be disputed. But whatever may have been his estimate of his own skill, it was rather below than above that which others placed upon it. The only time that a shade of scorn was seen to darken his face was when two volunteer soldiers, who had just killed a buffalo for the first time, undertook to instruct him as to the best method of "approaching." To borrow an illustration from an opposite side of life, an Eton boy might as well have sought to enlighten Porson on the formation of a Greek

verb, or a Fleet Street shopkeeper to instruct Chesterfield concerning a point of etiquette. Henry always seemed to think that he had a sort of prescriptive right to the buffalo, and to look upon them as something belonging peculiarly to himself. Nothing excited his indignation so much as any wanton destruction committed among the cows, and in his view shooting a calf was a cardinal sin.

And now let us actually see a buffalo caught by being "approached." The farther bank was about four or five feet high, and quite perpendicular, being cut away by water in the spring. Tall grass grew along its edge. Putting it aside with the hand, and cautiously looking through it, the hunter can discern the huge shaggy back of the buffalo swaying to and fro, as, with clumsy swinging gait, he advances toward the water. The buffalo have regular paths by which they come down to drink. Seeing at a glance along which of these his intended victim is moving, the hunter crouches under the bank within fifteen or twenty yards, it may be, of the point where the path enters the river. Here he sits down on the sand. Listening intently, he hears the heavy, monotonous tread of the approaching bull. The moment after he sees a motion among the long weeds and grass just at the place where the path is channelled through the bank. An enormous black head is thrust out, the horns just visible amid the mass of tangled mane. Half-sliding, half-plunging, down comes the buffalo upon the river-bed below. He steps out in full sight among the sands. He bends his head to drink. He raises his head, and the drops trickle from his wet beard. He stands with an air of stupid abstraction, unconscious of the lurking danger. Noiselessly the hunter cocks his rifle. The stock is at his shoulder; his eye ranges along the barrel. The bull, with slow deliberation, begins his march over the sands. He advances his fore-leg, and

exposes to view a small spot, denuded of hair, just behind the point of his shoulder; upon this the hunter brings the sight of his rifle to bear. Quick as thought the spiteful crack of the rifle responds to his touch. In the middle of the bare spot appears a small red dot. The buffalo shivers but does not fall. He totters; his knees bend under him; his head sinks forward to the ground.

Parkman himself was quite a hunter. He tells of an interesting experience he had when he says: "As we approached our nooning place, we saw five or six buffalo standing at the very summit of a tall bluff. Trotting forward to the spot where we meant to stop, I flung off my saddle and turned my horse loose. By making a circuit under cover of some rising ground, I reached the foot of the bluff unnoticed, and climbed up its steep side. Lying under the brow of the declivity, I prepared to fire at the buffalo, who stood on the flat surface about not five yards distant. Perhaps I was too hasty, for the gleaming rifle-barrel leveled over the edge caught their notice; they turned and ran. Close as they were, it was impossible to kill them when in that position, and stepping upon the summit, I pursued them over the high arid tableland. It was extremely rugged and broken; a great sandy ravine was channelled through it, with smaller ravines entering on each side like tributary streams. The buffalo scattered, and I soon lost sight of most of them as they scuttled away through the sandy chasms; a bull and a cow alone kept in view. For a while they ran along the edge of the great ravine, appearing and disappearing as they dived into some chasm and again emerged from it. At last they stretched out upon the broad prairie, a plain nearly flat and almost devoid of verdure, for every short grass-blade was dried and shriveled by the glaring sun. Now and then the old bull would face toward me; whenever he did so I fell to the

ground and lay motionless. In this manner I chased them for about two miles, until at length I heard in front a deep hoarse bellowing. A moment after a band of about a hundred bulls, before hidden by a slight swell of the plain, came at once into view. The fugitives ran toward them. Instead of mingling with the band, as I expected, they passed directly through, and continued their flight. At this I gave up the chase, and kneeling down, crawled to within gunshot of the bulls, and with panting breath and trickling brow sat down on the ground to watch them; my presence did not disturb them in the least. They were not feeding, for, indeed, there was nothing to eat; but they seemed to have chosen the parched and scorching desert as the scene of their amusements. Some were rolling on the ground amid a cloud of dust; others, with a hoarse rumbling bellow, were butting their large heads together, while many stood motionless, as if quite inanimate. Except their monstrous growth of tangled grizzly mane, they had no hair; for their old coat had fallen off in the spring, and their new one had not as yet appeared. Sometimes an old bull would step forward, and gaze at me with a grim and stupid countenance; then he would turn and butt his next neighbor; then he would lie down and roll over in the dirt, kicking his hoofs in the air. When satisfied with this amusement he would jerk his head and shoulders upward, and resting on his forelegs stare at me in this position, half blinded by his mane, and his face covered with dirt; then up he would spring upon all-fours, and shake his dusty sides; turning half round, he would stand with his beard touching the ground, in an attitude of profound abstraction, as if reflecting on his puerile conduct. 'You are too ugly to live,' thought I; and aiming at the ugliest, I shot three of them in succession. The rest were not at all discomposed at this; they

kept on bellowing and butting and rolling on the ground as before. Henry Chatillon always cautioned us to keep perfectly quiet in the presence of a wounded buffalo, for any movement is apt to excite him to make an attack; so I sat still upon the ground, loading and firing with as little motion as possible. While I was thus employed, a spectator made his appearance: a little antelope came running up with remarkable gentleness to within fifty yards; and there it stood, its slender neck arched, its small horns thrown back, and its large dark eyes gazing on me with a look of eager curiosity. By the side of the shaggy and brutish monsters before me, it seemed like some lovely young girl wandering near a den of robbers or a nest of bearded pirates. The buffalo looked uglier than ever. 'Here goes for another of you,' thought I, feeling in my pouch for a percussion-cap. Not a percussion-cap was there. My good rifle was useless as an old iron bar. One of the wounded bulls had not yet fallen, and I waited for some time, hoping every moment that his strength would fail him. He still stood firm, looking grimly at me, and disregarding Henry's advice I rose and walked away. Many of the bulls turned and looked at me, but the wounded brute made no attack. I soon came upon a deep ravine which would give me shelter in case of emergency; so I turned round and threw a stone at the bulls. They received it with the utmost indifference. Feeling myself insulted at their refusal to be frightened, I swung my hat, shouted, and made a show of running toward them; at this they crowded together and galloped off, leaving their dead and wounded upon the field. As I moved toward the camp I saw the last survivor totter and fall dead. My speed in returning was wonderfully quickened by the reflection that the Pawnees were abroad, and that I was defenseless in case of meeting with an enemy. I saw no living thing, however, except

two or three squalid old bulls scrambling among the sand-hills that flanked the great ravine. When I reached camp the party were nearly ready for the afternoon move."

On the remarkable trip no serious mishaps crept in to spoil the journey. Parkman, ever watchful for elegant bits of scenery, enjoyed the views by sunrise and sunset, at noonday and at night. And well might he revel in some of the scenes when before sunrise in the morning the snow-covered mountains were beautifully tinged with a delicate rose color. One of the most impressive sights witnessed in the entire journey was that of Pike's Peak and his giant brethren rising out of the level prairie, as if springing from the bed of the ocean. From their summits down to the plain below they were involved in a mantle of clouds, in restless motion, as if urged by strong winds. For one instant some snowy peak, towering in awful solitude, would be disclosed to view. As the clouds broke along the mountain, could be seen the dreary forests, the tremendous precipices, the white patches of snow, the gulfs and chasms as black as night, all revealed for an instant, and then disappearing from view. One recalled the stanza of "Childe Harold:"

> Morn dawns, and with it stern Albania's hills,
> Dark Suli's rocks, and Pindus' inland peak,
> Robed half in mist, bedewed with snowy rills,
> Array'd in many a dun and purple streak,
> Arise; and, as the clouds along them break,
> Disclose the dwelling of the mountaineer:
> Here roams the wolf, the eagle whets his beak,
> Birds, beasts of prey, and wilder men appear,
> And gathering storms around convulse the closing year.

Every line save one of this description was more than verified here. There were no "dwellings of the mountaineer" among these heights. Fierce savages, restlessly wandering through summer and winter, alone invade them. "Their hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them."

Both on their going out and on their coming back they met with interesting experiences. One of the noteworthy incidents Parkman tells of the rough journey happened not far from Fort Laramie. Parkman says, "We passed over a burnt tract where the ground was hot beneath the horses' feet, and between the blazing sides of two mountains. Before long we had descended to a softer region, where we found a succession of little valleys watered by a stream, along the borders of which grew abundance of wild gooseberries and currants, and the children and many of the men straggled from the line of march to gather them as we passed along. Descending still farther, the view changed rapidly. The burning mountains were behind us, and through the open valleys in front we could see the oceanlike prairie, stretching beyond the sight. After passing through a line of trees that skirted the brook, Indians filed out upon the plains. I was thirsty and knelt down by the little stream to drink. As I mounted again I very carelessly left my rifle among the grass, and my thoughts being otherwise absorbed, I rode for some distance before discovering its absence. As the reader may conceive, I lost no time in turning about and galloping back in search of it. Passing the line of Indians, I watched every warrior as he rode by me at a canter, and at length discovered my rifle in the hands of one of them, who, on my approaching to claim it, immediately gave it up. Having no other means of acknowledging the obligation, I took off one of my spurs and gave it to him. He was greatly delighted, looking upon it as a distinguished mark of favor, and immediately held out his foot for me to buckle it on. As soon as I had done so, he struck it with all his force into the side of his horse, who gave a violent leap. The Indian laughed and spurred harder than before. At this the horse shot away like an arrow, amid the screams and laughter of the

squaws, and the ejaculations of the men, who exclaimed: 'Washtay!—Good!' at the potent effect of my gift. The Indian had no saddle, and nothing in place of a bridle except a leather string tied round the horse's jaw. The animal was of course wholly uncontrollable, and stretched away at full speed over the prairie, till he and his rider vanished behind a distant swell. I never saw the man again, but I presume no harm came to him. An Indian on horseback has more lives than a cat."

Leaving Fort Laramie, they took the southern route homeward. They were advised not to attempt the jaunt with fewer than twenty men. Indian war parties continually scouted the region. One might travel the three hundred and fifty miles without meeting a single human being. But Parkman and Shaw, not being able to collect and support twenty men, started out with their companions—Chatillon, Delorier and one other man, Raymond. These three did not object to the project. Chatillon was without fear; Delorier and Raymond without thought. As to the other two, Parkman himself says, "Our idea of what is indispensable to human existence and enjoyment had been wonderfully curtailed, and a horse, a rifle, and a knife seemed to make up the whole of life's necessaries. For these once obtained, together with the skill to use them, all else that is essential would follow in their train, and a host of luxuries besides. One other lesson our short prairie experience had taught us; that of profound contentment in the present, and utter contempt for what the future might bring forth."

So on the fourth day of August, early in the afternoon, they turned homeward. Toward night they became involved among deep ravines; and being also unable to find water, their journey was protracted to a very late hour. On the next morning they had to pass a long line of bluffs, whose raw sides, wrought upon by rains and

storms, were of a ghastly whiteness most oppressive to the sight. As they ascended a gap in these hills, the way was marked by huge footprints, like those of a human giant. They were the track of the grizzly bear; and on the previous day also they had seen abundance of them along the dry channels of the streams they had passed. Immediately after this they were crossing a barren plain, spreading in long and gentle undulations to the horizon. Though the sun was bright, there was a light haze in the atmosphere. The distant hills assumed strange, distorted forms, and the edge of the horizon was continually changing its aspect. Shaw and Parkman were riding together, and Henry Chatillon was alone, a few rods before them; he stopped his horse suddenly, and turning round with the peculiar eager and earnest expression which he always wore when excited, he called them to come forward. They galloped to his side. Henry pointed toward a black speck on the gray swell of the prairie, apparently about a mile off. "It must be a bear," said he; "come, now, we shall all have some sport. Better fun to fight him than to fight an old buffalo bull; grizzly bear so strong and smart."

So they all galloped forward together, prepared for a hard fight; for these bears, though clumsy in appearance and extremely large, are incredibly fierce and active. The swell of the prairie concealed the black object from their view. Immediately after it appeared again. But now it seemed quite near to them and as they looked at it in astonishment, it suddenly separated into two parts, each of which took wing and flew away. They stopped their horses and looked round at Henry, whose face exhibited a curious mixture of mirth and mortification. His hawk's eye had been so completely deceived by the peculiar atmosphere that he had mistaken two large crows at the distance of fifty rods for a grizzly bear a

mile off. To the journey's end Henry never heard the last of the grizzly bear with wings.

Soon after leaving Fort Laramie some uncanny Indian revels were witnessed. Parkman says: "About midnight, as I lay asleep, Raymond came up and woke me. Looking down into the camp I saw, on the farther side of it, a great number of Indians gathered around a fire, the bright glare of which made them visible through the thick darkness; while from the midst of them proceeded a loud, measured chant, broken occasionally by a burst of sharp yells. I walked down to the spot. As I was pushing among them with but little ceremony, a chief interposed himself, and I was given to understand that a white man must not approach the scene of their solemnities too closely. By passing around to the other side, where there was an opening in the crowd, I could see clearly what was going forward. The society of the "Strong Hearts" were engaged in one of their dances. The Strong Hearts are a warlike association, comprising men of both the Dakota and Cheyenne nations, and entirely composed, or supposed to be so, of young braves of the highest mettle. Its fundamental principle is the admirable one of never retreating from any enterprise once commenced. All these Indian associations have a tutelary spirit. That of the Strong Hearts is embodied in the fox, an animal which a white man would hardly have selected for a similar purpose, though his subtle and cautious character agrees well enough with an Indian's notions of what is honorable in warfare. The dancers were circling round and round the fire. They would imitate with the most ludicrous exactness the motions and the voice of their sly patron, the fox. Then a startling yell would be given. Many other warriors would leap into the ring, and they would all stamp, whoop, and brandish their weapons like so many frantic devils."

Before the party were aware of it, they were getting toward home. "We were passing through the country of the half-civilized Shawanoes," says Parkman. "It was a beautiful alternation of fertile plains and groves, whose foilage was just tinged with the hues of autumn, while close beneath them rested the neat log-houses of the Indian farmers. Every field and meadow bespoke the exuberant fertility of the soil. The maize stood rustling in the wind, matured and dry, its shining yellow ears thrust out between the gaping husks. Squashes and enormous yellow pumpkins lay basking in the sun in the midst of their brown and shriveled leaves. Robins and blackbirds flew about the fences; and everything in short betokened our near approach to home and civilization. The forests that border on the Missouri soon rose before us, and we entered the wide tract of shrubbery which forms their outskirts. We had passed the same road on our outward journey in the spring, but its aspect was totally changed. The young wild apple-trees, then flushed with their fragrant blossoms, were now hung thickly with ruddy fruit. The vines were laden with dark purple grapes, and the slender twigs of the maple, then tasseled with their clusters of small red flowers, now hung out a gorgeous display of leaves stained by the frost with burning crimson. On every side we saw the tokens of maturity and decay where all had before been fresh and beautiful. We entered the forest, and ourselves and our horses were checkered, as we passed along, by the bright spots of sunlight that fell between the opening boughs. On either side the dark rich masses of foliage almost excluded the sun, though here and there its rays could find their way down, striking through the leaves and lighting them with a pure transparent green."

After a fortnight of railroads and steamboats, they saw once more the familiar features of home.

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223 Kingsley's Greek Heroes—Part II. The Story of Theseus
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229 Responsive Bible Readings—*Zeller*

SEVENTH YEAR

Literature

13 Courtship of Miles Standish
14 Evangeline—*Longfellow*
15 Snow Bound—*Whittier*
20 The Great Stone Face—*Hawthorne*
123 Selections from Wordsworth
124 Selections from Shelley and Keats
125 Selections from Merchant of Venice
147 Story of King Arthur as told by Tennyson—*Hallock*

Continued on next page

INSTRUCTOR LITERATU

149 Man Without a Country, The—*Hale*
192 Story of Jean Valjean.
193 Selections from the Sketch Book.
196 The Gray Champion—*Hawthorne*
213 Poems of Thomas Moore—Selected
216 Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare—Selected
231 The Oregon Trail(Condensed from Parkman)
238 Lamb's Adventures of Ulysses—Part I
239 Lamb's Adventures of Ulysses—Part II

EIGHTH YEAR

Literature

17 Enoch Arden—*Tennyson*
18 Vision of Sir Launfal—*Lowell*
19 Cotter's Saturday Night—*Burns*
23 The Deserted Village—*Goldsmith*
126 Rime of the Ancient Mariner
127 Gray's Elegy and Other Poems
128 Speeches of Lincoln
129 Selections from Julius Cæsar
130 Selections from Henry the Eighth
131 Selections from Macbeth
142 Scott
154 Scott
143 Build
Lon
148 Hora
150 Bunk
the ... and Jefferson Oration—*Webster*
151 Gold Bug, The—*Poe*
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