

Putt in old Nature's sermons — them 's the best ;
 And 'casion'ly hang up a hornets' nest
 'At boys 'at 's run away from school can git
 At handy-like — and let 'em tackle it !
 Let us be wrought on, of a truth, to feel
 Our proneness fer to hurt more than we heal,
 In ministratin' to our vain delights,
 Fergittin' even *insec's* has their rights !

No "Ladies' Amaranth," ner "Treasury" book,
 Ner "Night-Thoughts," nuther, ner no "Lally Rook !"
 We want some poetry 'at 's to our taste,
 Made out o' truck 'at 's jes a-goin' to waste
 'Cause smart folks thinks it 's altogether too
 Outrageous common — 'cept fer me and you!
 Which goes to argy, all sich poetry
 Is 'bliged to rest its hopes on you and me.

James Whitcomb Riley.

FRANCIS PARKMAN.¹



FRANCIS PARKMAN was born in Boston, September 16, 1823, in a fine old house of the colonial period, fronting on Bowdoin Square, with a grass-plot before it, shaded by tall horse-chestnut trees, and a garden behind it full of fruit-trees and honest old-fashioned flowers. Like many other eminent New Englanders, he came of a clerical ancestry. His great-grandfather, by birth a Bostonian, was the first minister of Westborough, Massachusetts.

It is worth mentioning that a son of this clergyman, at the age of seventeen, served as private

in a Massachusetts regiment during that old French war, as it used to be called, to which his grandnephew has given a deeper meaning, and which he has made alive to us again in all its vivid picturesqueness of hardihood and adventure. Another of his sons, returning to Boston, became a successful merchant there, a man of marked character and public spirit, whose fortune, patiently acquired in the wise fashion of those days, would have secured for his grandson a life of lettered ease had he not made the nobler choice of spending it in strenuous literary labor. One of this merchant's sons, a clergyman, was our author's father. He still survives in traditions of an abundant and exquisite humor, provoked to wilder hazards, and set in stronger relief (as in Sterne) by the decorum of his cloth. Two professorships in Harvard College perpetuate the munificence of Mr. Parkman's family. Energy of character and aptitude for culture were a natural inheritance from such ancestors, and both have been abundantly illustrated in the life of their descendant.

Whether through deliberate forethought or unconscious instinct, Mr. Parkman entered early into an apprenticeship for what was to be the work of his life. While yet in college, as we are informed by a note in his "Montcalm and Wolfe," he followed on foot the trail of Rogers the Ranger in his retreat from Lake Memphremagog to the Connecticut in 1759. In 1846, two years after taking his degree at Harvard, he made an expedition, demanding

¹ This essay was undertaken at our request by Mr. Lowell, and was left unfinished at his death. It has the melancholy interest of being the last piece of writing prepared by him for publication.—EDITOR OF THE CENTURY.

as much courage as endurance, to what was still the Wild West, penetrating as far as the Rocky Mountains, and living for months among the Dakotas, as yet untainted in their savage ways by the pale-face. Since Major Jonathan Carver, no cultivated man of English blood has had such opportunities for studying the character and habits of the North American Indian.

The exposures and privations of this journey were too much even for Mr. Parkman's vigorous constitution, and left him a partial cripple for life. As if this were not enough, another calamity befell him in after years,—the most dire of all for a scholar,—in a disease of the eyes which made the use of them often impossible and at best precarious. But such was his inward and spiritual energy, that, in spite of these hopeless impediments, he has studied on the spot the scenery of all his narratives, and has contrived to sift all the wearisome rubbish heaps of documents, printed or manuscript, public or private, where he could hope to find a scrap of evidence to his purpose.

It is rare, indeed, to find, as they are found in him, a passion for the picturesque and a native predilection for rapidity and dash of movement in helpful society with patience in drudgery and a scrupulous deference to the rights of facts, however disconcerting, as at least sleeping-partners in the business of history. Though never putting on the airs of the philosophic historian, or assuming his privilege to be tiresome, Mr. Parkman never loses sight of those links of cause and effect, whether to be sought in political theory, religious belief, or mortal incompleteness, which give to the story of Man a moral, and reduce the fortuitous to the narrow limits where it properly belongs.

There was a time, perhaps more fortunate than ours, when Clio, if her own stylus seemed too blunt, borrowed that of Calliope, that she might "submit the shews of things to the desires of the mind," and give an epic completeness to her story. Nature had not yet refused her sympathy to men of heroic breed, and earth still shuddered, sun and moon still veiled their faces at the right tragical crisis. The historian could then draw on the accumulated fancy of mankind in the legend, or on the sympathy of old religion in the myth. He was not only permitted, but it was a prime function of his office that he should fuse together and stamp in one shining medal of ideal truth all that shabby small change of particulars, each bearing her debased and diminished image, which we in our day are compelled to

accept as an equivalent. Then the expected word was always spoken by the right man at the culminating moment, while now it is only when Fortune sends us a master of speech like Lincoln that we cease to regret the princely largess of Thucydides, Livy, and Tacitus.

Surely it was a piece of good luck for us that a man of genius should do the speaking for those who were readier with deeds than with the phrases to trick them out heroically. Shakspeare is the last who has dealt thus generously with history in our own tongue. But since we can no longer have the speech that ought to have been spoken, it is no small compensation to get that which *was* spoken; for there is apt to be a downrightness and simplicity in the man of action's words that drive his meaning home as no eloquence could.

It is a great merit in Mr. Parkman that he has sedulously culled from his ample store of documents every warranted piece of evidence of this kind that could fortify or enliven his narrative, so that we at least come to know the actors in his various dramas as well as the events in which they shared. And thus the curiosity of the imagination and that of the understanding are together satisfied. We follow the casualties of battle with the intense interest of one who has friends or acquaintance there. Mr. Parkman's familiarity also with the scenery of his narratives is so intimate, his memory of the eye is so vivid, as almost to persuade us that ourselves have seen what he describes. We forget ourselves to swim in the canoe down rivers that flow out of one primeval silence to lose themselves in another, or to thread those expectant solitudes of forest (*insuetum nemus*) that seem listening with stayed breath for the inevitable ax, and then launch our birchen eggshells again on lakes that stretch beyond vision into the fairyland of conjecture. The world into which we are led touches the imagination with pathetic interest. It is mainly a world of silence and of expectation, awaiting the masters who are to subdue it and to fill it with the tumult of human life, and of almost more than human energy.

One of the convincing tests of genius is the choice of a theme, and no greater felicity can befall it than to find one both familiar and fresh. All the better if tradition, however attenuated, have made it already friendly with our fancy. In the instinct that led him straight to subjects that seemed waiting for him so long, Mr. Parkman gave no uncertain proof of his fitness for an adequate treatment of them.

James Russell Lowell.

NOTE ON THE COMPLETION OF MR. PARKMAN'S WORK.



HE work of Milton is a more lasting and a vastly nobler monument of his age and race than the contemporaneous cathedral, but the men who first admired St. Paul's did not dream that a man of Sir Christopher's time had builded better than he. We are materialists, as were our fathers before us, and we leave intellectual workers of the higher kind to toil in solitude, little cheered by appreciation; and when we give them appreciation we make them share it with the mere masqueraders in science. Only the other day, in a quiet library in Chestnut street, Boston, a great scholar, who is at the same time a charming writer, put the last touches to a work that has cost almost a lifetime of absorbing and devoted toil. Had the result been something material,—a colossal bridge, for example, like that which stretches above the mast-tops between New York and Brooklyn,—the whole nation would have watched the last strokes.

But it is possible that the historian of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in America will find few events more notable than the completion of the work of Mr. Francis Parkman—that series of historical narratives, now at last grown to one whole, in which the romantic story of the rise, the marvelous expansion, and the ill-fated ending of the French power in North America is for the first time adequately told. Since its charms have been set before us in Mr. Parkman's picturesque pages, it is easy to understand that it is one of the finest themes that ever engaged the pen of the historian. But before a creative spirit had brooded upon it, while it yet lay formless and void, none but a man of original genius could have discovered a theme fit for a master in the history of a remote and provincial failure. And yet in no episode of human history is the nature of man seen in more varied action than in this story of the struggles of France and England in the new world. Here is the reaction of an old and civilized world on a new and barbarous continent, here are the far-reaching travels and breathless adventures of devoted missionaries, ambitious explorers and soldiers, money-getting traders, and *coureurs des bois*. What a network of motives—religious, patriotic, and personal—is displayed in this emulation of races, religions, of savage tribes, of European nationalities, of military and commercial adventurers, of intriguing statesmen and provincial magnates. The reader lives in the very effervescence that produced our modern America. In these contests were decided the mastery of the white man and

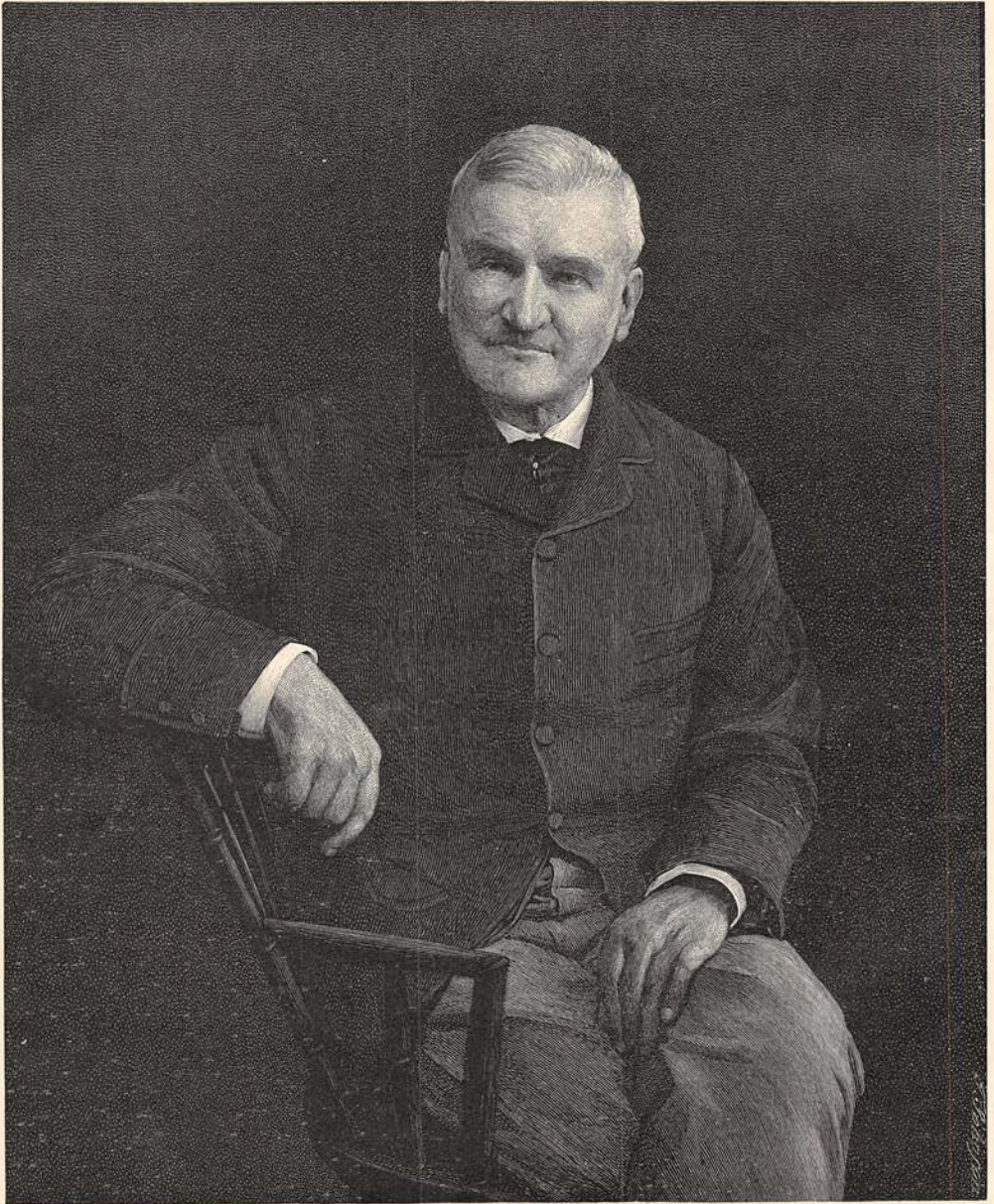
the extinction of the red, the dominance of the Anglo-Saxon on the continent, and the prevalence of the English tongue, and these conflicts played an important part in the evolution of institutions that are neither English nor French.

A great writer, like any other great character, is the offspring of two things: the man, and an opportunity suited to the outfit of the man. Francis Parkman gravitated to the wilderness in his early manhood, and lived among the savages as an acute observer of their customs and their spirit. His literary life has followed the trend of his individuality. He early began to write of frontier adventure and character, at first in fiction, and then in the remarkable series of historic compositions that now forms one of the great monuments of our literature. Never has the very soul of the wilderness been better understood and reproduced than in some of these histories.

There has arisen in our time a new school of historians, men of large and accurate scholarship, who are destitute of skill in literary structure, and who hold style in contempt. They dump the crude ore of history into their ponderous sentences, and leave the reader to struggle with it as he can. There are writers of a higher type who fail, through no fault of their own, to acquire an attractive style of narration. The late George Bancroft, with all his vast erudition, and his ambitious manner, will never be read for pleasure, and Mr. Freeman's diffuse and journalistic diction is an eddy tide that only a courageous reader cares to stem. Away over on the other hand are the books of Mr. Froude, which are interesting enough to people willing to read narratives "founded on fact." Mr. Parkman belongs distinctly to the class of learned historical scholars who are also skilful and charming writers. His books, to borrow a phrase from Augustin Thierry, are important "additions to historical science, and at the same time works of literary art."

It is no part of my purpose to write a criticism of Mr. Parkman's books. I write only to celebrate the completion of a work that is a lasting honor to our age and nation. In his forty-five years of work Mr. Parkman has ripened his judgment and matured his style, and the later books show a fuller mastery of the art of writing history, and a more severe taste, than the earlier productions of the same series. I do not believe that the literature of America can show any historical composition at once so valuable and so delightful as the two volumes, entitled "Wolfe and Montcalm," with which the whole work culminates.

Edward Eggleston.



ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

Francis Parkman