

# READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

ON A BUST OF GENERAL GRANT.

Two stanzas from the last poem written by James Russell Lowell, in *Scribner's Magazine* for March.

A FACE all prose where Time's (benignant) haze  
Softens no raw edge yet, nor makes all fair  
With the beguiling light of vanished days;  
This is relentless granite, bleak and bare,  
Roughhewn and scornful of æsthetic phrase;  
Nothing is here for fancy, naught for dreams,  
The Present's hard, uncompromising light  
Accents all vulgar outlines, flaws and seams,  
Yet vindicates some pristine natural right  
O'ertrapping that hereditary grace  
Which marks the gain or loss of some time-fondled race.

So Marius looked, methinks, and Cromwell so,  
Not in the purple born, to those they led  
Nearer for that and costlier to the foe,  
Newmoulders for old forms, by nature bred  
The exhaustless life of manhood's seeds to show,  
Let but the ploughshare of portentous times  
Strike deep enough to reach them where they lie:  
Despair and danger are their fostering climes,  
And their best sun bursts from a stormy sky:  
He was our man of men, nor would abate  
The utmost due manhood could claim of fate.

## THE DELIGHTS OF JAMAICA.

THE climate of these uplands is perfect, resembling the most lovely English summer weather, with a fresh, exhilarating feeling in the air that recalls Switzerland and the Alps. The evenings, however, are cooler than those of our English summer, so that when the day closes it is pleasant to have a fire of fragrant cedar logs in the sitting-room. The scenery all around is strikingly fine. Blue Mountain Peak, the highest mountain in the West Indies, on whose summit, as is related with pride, ice has more than once been found, rises on one hand; John Crow Peak on the other, beyond which rise range upon range of mountains melting away in a blue haze on the horizon. Below glistens the placid sea; through it the palisades writhe like a dark serpent with Port Royal for its head, guarding the magnificent harbour, while "distance lends enchantment to the view" of hot, dusty Kingston, with the Lignanea plain brightened here and there by the green gleam of cane fields. The rides through the high mountain district are most beautiful, but one must have a steady head to venture on some of the paths, which, in places, are barely a couple of feet wide, the mountain rising sheer at one side to a precipice at the other, down which a single false step on the part of one's pony would send one spinning some couple of thousand feet. On many of these paths it is dangerous to stop for a single moment, and impossible to turn round or pass man or beast. In one instance a lady dropped her handkerchief and had to proceed without it, as the track is so narrow that no one would dismount to pick it up. The hills are thickly covered with masses of the largest and most juicy wild strawberries to be procured anywhere; in places they grow as if planted in regular beds. Cape gooseberries and blackberries abound, and there are bilberries in quantities, but the lowly shrub from which we were wont at home to pluck the latter has there sprung into a regular tree, in whose shade we sit and rest when wearied with strawberry picking. Enjoyable expeditions may be made in all directions. A ride to the top of the peak and a night in the hut near the summit for the enterprising, or a tramp to the top of cloud-capped John Crow, clearing the way as we go with machetes, the shrill whistle of the unseen "solitaire" ringing all round us; every now and then the presence of a wild hog hidden in the bush telling how much he is disturbed by the unwonted intrusion. So invigorating is the air that one may walk for miles without feeling fatigue. To the lover of botany or the collector of ferns, the highlands of Jamaica are simply paradise.—*From the Highlands of Jamaica, by Lady Edith Blake, in North American Review for March.*

## HORSEMANSHIP AND POLO.

HORSEMANSHIP originated in Asia. Our earliest records of this noble exercise locate it in Asia Minor among the Trojans. Hector in the Iliad is the "horse-taming Hector." In the catalogue of the warriors who contended for Helen on the Plains of the Troad, the Greeks (from Europe) are mentioned only as navigators, archers and spear-men; but when the poet comes to the Trojans (Asiatic, and their allies from Asia Minor) he begins, "Asius, son of Hyrtacus, whom large and fiery steeds bore from Arisbe, from the river Silleis." "The sturdy heart of Pylæmenes, from the Eneti, whence is the race of wild horses." "And the portals of Troy were opened, and the troops rushed out, both foot and horse." And the closing verse of the Iliad is familiar to all scholars: "Thus indeed they performed the funeral rites of the horse-subduing Hector." It may be noted, however, that what we now term cavalry combats were not known at that period. Both Greek and Asiatic heroes rode in two-wheeled chariots open at the rear, and the axles close to the ground, the wheels being of small size. From these chariots or cars they hurled their spears. When it came to swords, they leaped to the ground and fought on foot. The first mention we have of horseback fighting is in Per-

sian and Assyrian annals. The inhabitants of South-western Europe lived in a hilly, rugged country, unsuited to cavalry warfare. Such a method of fighting, as well as of exercise, was naturally practised on the vast plains of Asia Minor and Arabia. When the ten thousand Greeks, hired by the younger Cyrus, marched against his brother Artaxerxes in that expedition which has made Xenophon at once immortal and the terror of every school-boy in Christendom who finds himself plunged into the "Anabasis" before he has mastered the Greek verb, the Greeks fought on foot, while the Persian Cyrus on horseback charged almost alone into the ranks of horsemen that attended his brother, and was cut down by their scimitars. The Persians and the Arabs were—like Dazzle in "London Assurance"—virtually "born on horseback." A vivid picture of the early training in equitation of a Persian prince is afforded us in the "Boyhood of Cyrus," by Xenophon. There could be no better style for us to copy than that of the Greeks. If we look at any one of the many models of Greek warriors, we shall see at once that they look perfectly at home on horseback.—*From "Horsemanship and Polo," by Foshall Keene, in March Lippincott's.*

## THE SHORT STORY.

AMERICAN writers, less greedy than Lord Bacon, have taken the short story for their province. Patriotism, to be sure, compels us to blow our national trumpet in many different directions; but in this matter patriotism may be left where Lady Teazle desired to leave honour, and we may rest on our own signal merit without any flourish of trumpets. The French have brought the *conte* to the great perfection of M. Guy de Maupassant, not to speak of writers who are dead, and to the lesser perfections of many lesser men; England has Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Kipling; and translations from time to time apprise persons who read English and French only that other literatures, the Slavonic in particular, have a delicate art of their own in the short story. But there is no sign that the art is anywhere so rich, so varied or so fresh as it is with us. In England it has been and remains foreign and sporadic; in America it is the most vital as well as the most distinctive part of literature. In fact, it flourishes so amply that this very prosperity nullifies most of the apologies for the American novel. Perhaps the answer more often made than any other to attacks upon that department of fiction is that life in the United States is poor in variety, and especially in the contrast of classes, which is frequently the only means of existence for an English novel. Hence, it is said, the cis-atlantic novelist takes refuge in the Tennessee mountains, or in the international episode, or in Creole days of long ago, and leaves the average of here and now to Mr. Howells and a few other hardy spirits. But the American short story, however episodic by nature, needs no other nation to assist its episode. Nor does it need the mountains of Tennessee or the Creole past, although it scorns none of these adventitious helps to interest. It appears to have become, in truth, the national mode of utterance in the things of the imagination, and, taking its own wherever it finds it, the short story has become more and more variously expressive.—*Atlantic Monthly for February.*

## CURIOSITIES OF ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE.

IT is a marked characteristic of the cactus tribe to be very tenacious of life, and when hacked to pieces, to spring afresh in full vigour from every scrap or fragment. True vegetable hydras, when you cut down one, ten spring in its place; every separate morsel of the thick and succulent stem has the power of growing anew into a separate cactus. Surprising as this peculiarity seems at first sight, it is only a special desert modification of a faculty possessed in a less degree by almost all plants and by many animals. If you cut off the end of a rose-branch and stick it in the ground under suitable conditions, it grows into a rose-tree. If you take cuttings of scarlet geraniums or common verbenas, and pot them in moist soil, they bud out apace into new plants like their parents. Certain special types can even be propagated from fragments of the leaf; for example, there is a particularly vivacious begonia off which you may snap a corner of one blade, and hang it up by a string from a peg or the ceiling, when, hi presto! little begonia plants begin to bud out incontinently on every side from its edges. A certain German professor went even further than that; he chopped up a liver-wort very fine into vegetable mincemeat, which he then spread thin over a saucerful of moist sand, and lo! in a few days the whole surface of the mess was covered with a perfect forest of sprouting little liver-worts. Roughly speaking, one may say that every fragment of every organism has in it the power to rebuild in its entirety another organism like the one of which it was once formed a compound element. Similarly with animals. Cut off a lizard's tail, and straightway a new tail grows in its place with surprising promptitude. Cut off a lobster's claw, and in a very few weeks that lobster is walking about airily on his native rocks, with two claws as usual. True, in these cases the tail and the claw don't bud out in turn into a new lizard or a new lobster. But that is a penalty the higher organisms have to pay for their extreme complexity. They have lost that plasticity, that freedom of growth, which characterizes the simpler and more primitive forms of life; in their case the power of producing fresh organisms entire from a single fragment, once diffused equally over the whole body, is now

confined to certain specialized cells which, in their developed form, we know as seeds or eggs. Yet, even among animals, at a low stage of development, this original power of reproducing the whole from a single part remains inherent in the organism, for you may chop up a fresh-water hydra into a hundred little bits, and every bit will be capable of growing afresh into a complete hydra. Now, desert plants would naturally retain this primitive tendency in a very high degree; for they are specially organized to resist drought—being the survivors of generations of drought-proof ancestors and, like the camel, they have often to struggle on through long periods of time without a drop of water. That is why the prickly pear is so common in all countries where the climate suits it, and where it has once managed to gain a foothold. The more you cut it down the thicker it springs; each murdered bit becomes the parent in due time of a numerous offspring. Man, however, with his usual ingenuity, has managed to best the plant on its own ground, and turn it into a useful fodder for his beasts of burden. The prickly pear is planted abundantly on bear rocks in Algeria, where nothing else would grow, and is cut down when adult, divested of its thorns by a rough process of hacking, and used as food for camels and cattle. It thus provides fresh moist fodder in the African summer when the grass is dried up and all other pasture crops have failed entirely. The flowers of the prickly pear, as of many other cactuses, grow apparently on the edge of the leaves, which alone might give the observant mind a hint as to the true nature of those thick and flattened expansions. For whenever what look like leaves bear flowers or fruit on their edge or midrib, as in the familiar instance of butcher's broom, you may be sure at a glance they are really branches in disguise masquerading as foliage.—*Grant Allen, in Longmans Magazine.*

EVERY man will be thy friend  
Whilst thou hast wherewith to spend:  
But if thy store of crowns be scant,  
No man will supply thy want.

—Shakespeare.

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