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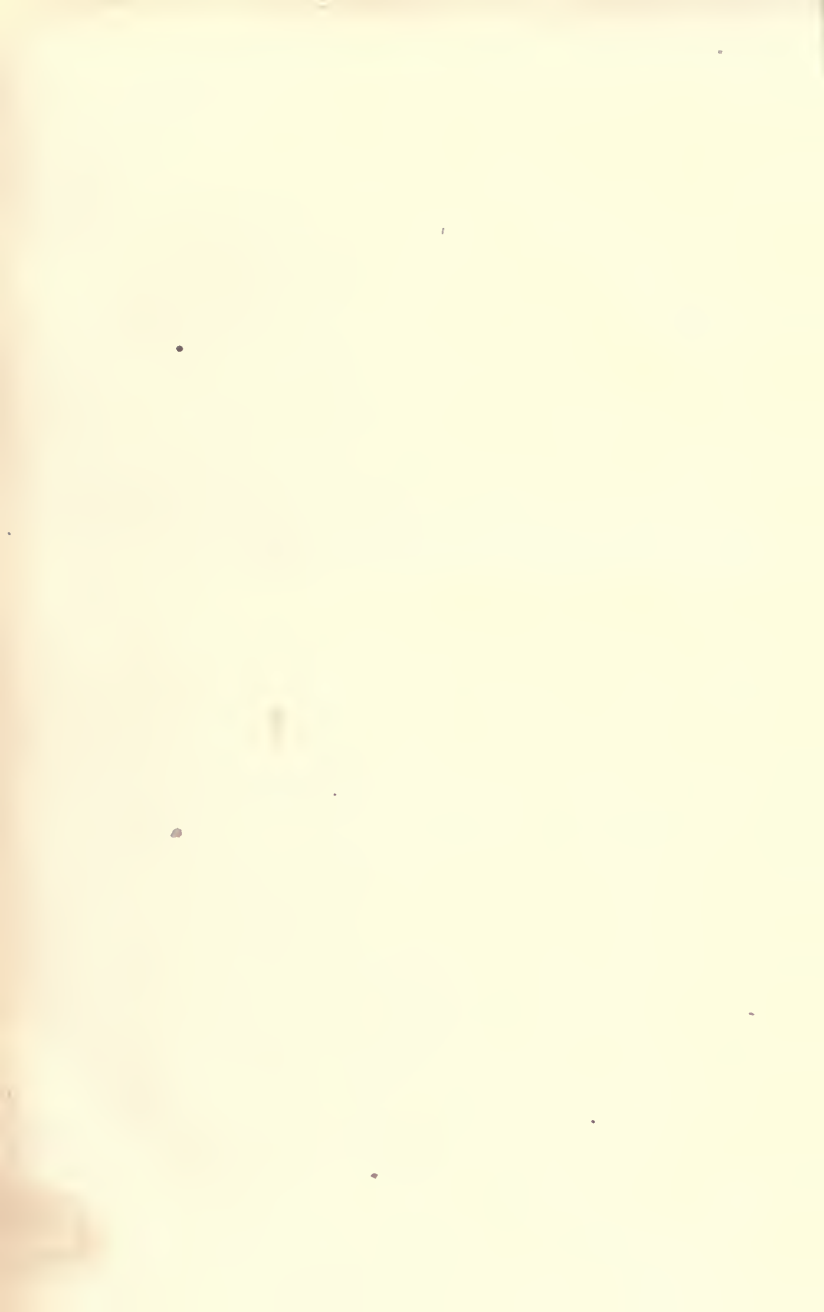
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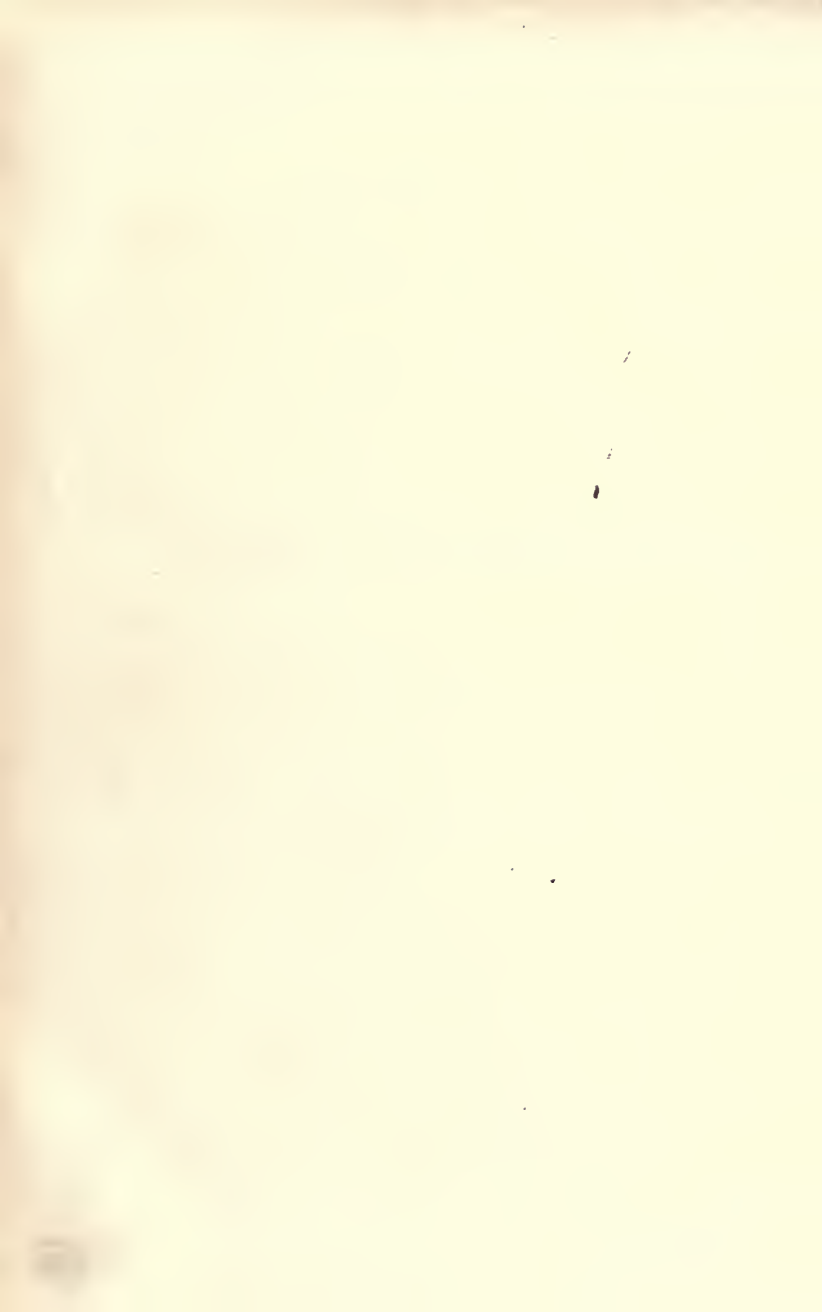












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THE

OAK-OPENINGS;

OR

THE BEE-HUNTER.

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BY J. FENIMORE COOPER

NOV. 1898

There have been tears from holier eyes than mine
Pour'd o'er thee, Zion! yea, the Son of Man
This thy devoted hour foresaw, and wept.—*Milman.*

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

NEW EDITION.

NEW YORK:
STRINGER AND TOWNSEND.

1856.

OAK OPENINGS.

Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1848, by
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PREFACE.



It ought to be matter of surprise how men live in the midst of marvels, without taking heed of their existence. The slightest derangement of their accustomed walks in political or social life shall excite all their wonder, and furnish themes for their discussions, for months; while the prodigies that come from above are presented daily to their eyes, and are received without surprise, as things of course. In a certain sense, this may be well enough, inasmuch as all which comes directly from the hands of the Creator may be said so far to exceed the power of human comprehension, as to be beyond comment; but the truth would show us that the cause of this neglect is rather a propensity to dwell on such interests as those over which we have a fancied control, than on those which confessedly transcend our understanding. Thus is it ever with men. The wonders of creation meet them at every turn, without awakening reflection, while their minds labour on subjects that are not only ephemeral and illusory,

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merary, for the sake of uniformity that mode of spelling, wrong as we think it, has been continued throughout the book.

There is nothing imaginary in the fertility of the west. Personal observation has satisfied us that it much surpasses anything that exists in the Atlantic states, unless in exceptions, through the agency of great care and high manuring, or in instances of peculiar natural soil. In these times, men almost fly. We have passed over a thousand miles of territory within the last few days, and have brought the pictures at the two extremes of this journey in close proximity in our mind's eye. Time may lessen that wonderful fertility, and bring the whole country more on a level; but there it now is, a glorious gift from God, which it is devoutly to be wished may be accepted with due gratitude, and with a constant recollection of His unwavering rules of right and wrong, by those who have been selected to enjoy it.

June, 1848

THE OAK OPENINGS.

CHAPTER I.

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day,
From every opening flower.

Watts' Hymns for Children.

WE have heard of those who fancied that they beheld a signal instance of the hand of the Creator in the celebrated cataract of Niagara. Such instances of the power of sensible and near objects to influence certain minds, only prove how much easier it is to impress the imaginations of the dull with images that are novel, than with those that are less apparent, though of infinitely greater magnitude. Thus, it would seem to be strange, indeed, that any human being should find more to wonder at in any one of the phenomena of the earth, than in the earth itself; or, should specially stand astonished at the might of Him who created the world, when each night brings into view a firmament studded with other worlds, each equally the work of His hands!

Nevertheless, there is (at bottom) a motive for adoration, in the study of the lowest fruits of the wisdom and power of God. The leaf is as much beyond our comprehension of remote causes, as much a subject of intelligent admiration, as the tree which bears it: the single tree confounds our knowledge and researches the same as the entire forest; and, though a variety that appears to be endless pervades the world, the same admirable adaptation of means to ends, the same bountiful forethought, and the same bene-

volent wisdom are to be found in the acorn, as in the gnarled branch on which it grew.

The American forest has so often been described, as to cause one to hesitate about reviving scenes that might possibly pall, and in retouching pictures that have been so frequently painted as to be familiar to every mind. But God created the woods, and the themes bestowed by his bounty are inexhaustible. Even the ocean, with its boundless waste of water, has been found to be rich in its various beauties and marvels; and he who shall bury himself with us, once more, in the virgin forests of this wide-spread land, may possibly discover new subjects of admiration, new causes to adore the being that has brought all into existence, from the universe to its most minute particle.

The precise period of our legend was in the year 1812, and the season of the year the pleasant month of July, which had now drawn near to its close. The sun was already approaching the western limits of a wooded view, when the actors in its opening scene must appear on a stage that is worthy of a more particular description.

The region was, in one sense, wild, though it offered a picture that was not without some of the strongest and most pleasing features of civilization. The country was what is termed "rolling," from some fancied resemblance to the surface of the ocean, when it is just undulating with a long "ground-swell." Although wooded, it was not as the American forest is wont to grow, with tall straight trees towering towards the light, but with intervals between the low oaks that were scattered profusely over the view, and with much of that air of negligence that one is apt to see in grounds, where art is made to assume the character of nature. The trees, with very few exceptions, were what is called the "burr oak," a small variety of a very extensive genus; and the spaces between them, always irregular, and often of singular beauty, have obtained the name of "openings;" the two terms combined giving their appellation to this particular species of native forest, under the name of "Oak Openings."

These woods, so peculiar to certain districts of country, are not altogether without some variety, though possessing a general character of sameness. The trees were of very

uniform size, being little taller than pear trees, which they resemble a good deal in form; and having trunks that rarely attain two feet in diameter. The variety is produced by their distribution. In places they stand with a regularity resembling that of an orchard; then, again, they are more scattered and less formal, while wide breadths of the land are occasionally seen in which they stand in copses, with vacant spaces, that bear no small affinity to artificial lawns, being covered with verdure. The grasses are supposed to be owing to the fires lighted periodically by the Indians in order to clear their hunting-grounds.

Towards one of these grassy glades, which was spread on an almost imperceptible acclivity, and which might have contained some fifty or sixty acres of land, the reader is now requested to turn his eyes. Far in the wilderness as was the spot, four men were there, and two of them had even some of the appliances of civilization about them. The woods around were the then unpeopled forest of Michigan, and the small winding reach of placid water that was just visible in the distance, was an elbow of the Kalamazoo, a beautiful little river that flows westward, emptying its tribute into the vast expanse of Lake Michigan. Now, this river has already become known, by its villages and farms, and railroads and mills; but then, not a dwelling of more pretension than the wigwam of the Indian, or an occasional shanty of some white adventurer, had ever been seen on its banks. In that day, the whole of that fine peninsula, with the exception of a narrow belt of country along the Detroit river, which was settled by the French as far back as near the close of the seventeenth century, was literally a wilderness. If a white man found his way into it, it was as an Indian trader, a hunter, or an adventurer in some other of the pursuits connected with border life and the habits of the savages.

Of this last character were two of the men on the open glade just mentioned, while their companions were of the race of the aborigines. What is much more remarkable, the four were absolutely strangers to each other's faces, having met for the first time in their lives, only an hour previously to the commencement of our tale. By saying that they were strangers to each other, we do not mean that

the white men were acquaintances, and the Indians strangers, but that neither of the four had ever seen either of the party until they met on that grassy glade, though fame had made them somewhat acquainted through their reputations. At the moment when we desire to present this group to the imagination of the reader, three of its number were grave and silent observers of the movements of the fourth. The fourth individual was of middle size, young, active, exceedingly well formed, and with a certain open and frank expression of countenance, that rendered him at least well-looking, though slightly marked with the small-pox. His real name was Benjamin Boden, though he was extensively known throughout the north-western territories by the *sobriquet* of Ben Buzz—extensively as to distances, if not as to people. By the *voyageurs*, and other French of that region, he was almost universally styled *le Bourdon*, or the “Drone;” not, however, from his idleness or inactivity, but from the circumstance that he was notorious for laying his hands on the products of labour that proceeded from others. In a word, Ben Boden was a “bee-hunter,” and as he was one of the first to exercise his craft in that portion of the country, so was he infinitely the most skilful and prosperous. The honey of *le Bourdon* was not only thought to be purer and of higher flavour than that of any other trader in the article, but it was much the most abundant. There were a score of respectable families on the two banks of the Detroit, who never purchased of any one else, but who patiently waited for the arrival of the capacious bark canoe of Buzz, in the autumn, to lay in their supplies of this savoury nutriment for the approaching winter. The whole family of griddle cakes, including those of buckwheat, Indian, rice and wheaten flour, were more or less dependent on the safe arrival of *le Bourdon*, for their popularity and welcome. Honey was eaten with all; and *wild* honey had a reputation, rightfully or not obtained, that even rendered it more welcome than that which was formed by the labour and art of the domesticated bee.

The dress of *le Bourdon* was well adapted to his pursuits and life. He wore a hunting-shirt and trowsers, made of thin stuff, which was dyed green, and trimmed with yellow fringe. This was the ordinary forest attire of the

American rifleman; being of a character, as it was thought, to conceal the person in the woods, by blending its hues with those of the forest. On his head Ben wore a skin cap, somewhat smartly made, but without the fur; the weather being warm. His moccasins were a good deal wrought, but seemed to be fading under the exposure of many marches. His arms were excellent; but all his martial accoutrements, even to a keen long-bladed knife, were suspended from the rammer of his rifle; the weapon itself being allowed to lean, in careless confidence, against the trunk of the nearest oak, as if their master felt there was no immediate use for them.

Not so with the other three. Not only was each man well armed, but each man kept his trusty rifle hugged to his person, in a sort of jealous watchfulness; while the other white man, from time to time, secretly, but with great minuteness, examined the flint and priming of his own piece. This second pale-face was a very different person from him just described. He was still young, tall, sinewy, gaunt, yet springy and strong, stooping and round-shouldered, with a face that carried a very decided top-light in it, like that of the notorious Bardolph. In short, whiskey had dyed the countenance of Gershom Waring with a tell-tale hue, that did not less infallibly betray his destination, than his speech denoted his origin, which was clearly from one of the states of New England. But Gershom had been so long at the North-West as to have lost many of his peculiar habits and opinions, and to have obtained substitutes.

Of the Indians, one, an elderly, wary, experienced warrior, was a Pottawattamie, named Elksfoot, who was well known at all the trading-houses and "garrisons" of the North-Western Territory, including Michigan as low down as Detroit itself. The other red man was a young Chipewewa, or O-jeb-way, as the civilized natives of that nation now tell us the word should be spelled. His ordinary appellation among his own people was that of Pigeonswing; a name obtained from the rapidity and length of his flights. This young man, who was scarcely turned of five-and-twenty, had already obtained a high reputation among the numerous tribes of his nation, as a messenger, or "runner."

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