

471 - insert -
Founded upon "The Conquest" by Mrs Eva Emery
Dye

Blazing The Oregon Trail

AN EPIC POEM

By CYRUS H. WALKER.

(The oldest white man living born west of the Rocky Mountains.)



"Westward the star of empire takes its way."
But Lewis and Clark blazed Oregon's dawning day,
While Sacajawea pointed their trail *trail*
O'er mountains and plains and deep hidden vale.

Sound we Paeans of praise for Americans bold,
Whose fame as we know is a century old;
That Fourteenth of May, eighteen hundred and four,
From near where Missouri's stained waters out-pour
And mingle with the Mississippi's clear tide,
The queen of our rivers, and America's pride;
Start to blaze a plain trail to a far distant shore,
Where the Columbia and the Ocean meet with a roar.
Well skilled were these men in the backwoodsman's lore,
As they launch barge and boats from a dear home-land shore,
Grave Meriweather Lewis and kind William Clark,
Whose deeds blazed the wild West, as gleam search-lights when 'tis
dark.

And with them at first, were near thirty strong men,
All the hopes that inspired them we never can ken,
'Tis enough that we know they were daring and true,
Picked out for such service as comes to but few.
After a long, hot summer of hardship and toil,
They make winter's camp on Mandan Indian's home soil,
In some rude cabins built from cottonwood trees,
A stockade in front, Fort Mandan if you please.
Here the long winter months dragged slowly away,
With the cold as of north land for many a day,
But safe and secure from any and all foes,
They in a measure enjoyed their enforced repose.
Here also to cheer them, there suddenly came
A brave dusky heroine; Sacajawea by name,
The "Bird Woman" true, who oft guided the band
Until they all reached the long wished for land.

On February eleventh came a boy, who beguiled
With its cooing, the hours, or it cried, or it smiled,
And its mother became a great favorite with all,
Glad to go where she sent them or come at her call.
When the breezes of spring freed the ice fettered streams,
And the sun warmed the hillsides with its life giving beams,
New boats were made ready the toil to renew,
And the up river journey once more to pursue,
While the barge with ten men, sought loved home again,
Lade with treasures from river, hill, valley and plain.
On May the twenty-sixth from highest hills, appeared
Far in the hazy distance, whose lofty peaks upreared,
The shimmering, "Shining Mountains," with hoary summits crowned,
Our towering rugged "Rockies," famed all the world around.
June third the river forks and all repeat the cry,
Which is the true Missouri? the northern branch; and why?
"See how it boils and rolls" said one; others different thought,
And searching proved the southern was the one they sought.
Lewis, the northern branch, oft by frowning cliffs in-walled,
A cousin to honor, "Maria's river" called.
Before they leave the forks, from highest points between,
Countless buffalo, elk, and atelope, were seen.
A clear, swift stream they found, by Clark, was the "Judith," named,
Still mindful of a true love; nor can he well be blamed,
June twelfth the mountains loomed, as never seen before,
Peak rising after peak, high as the eagles soar.
The next day Lewis saw the great Missouri Falls,
The first of civilized men, as my memory recalls.
Filled with awe and wonder, he pondered its might
And wished his were a master hand to pencil the sight.
Here were rude wagons framed, a task not one of ease,
With wheels sawed from off some cottonwood trees.
On them goods and boats were hauled by the willing men,
O'er an eighteen mile portage, to smooth water again.
Thus a full month was spent in planning and toil
As they worked, pulled, and pushed, on an unfriendly soil.
On July the fourth booming sounds in the hills,
Seemed to chant liberty's praise, from the rocks and the rills.
Boats were launched once again the fifteenth of July,
And the men urged them on to a change drawing nigh,
Until in due time the "Three Forks" were found,
Where some days were spent looking around.
The streams were named for Washington friends, good and true,
The "Jefferson," "Gallatin," "Dolly Madison," too,
Then ascending the Jefferson, increasing the force,
In the Bitter Root mountains they find its source.
August the seventh they camped at the rock "Beaver Head"
That resembles the head of a beaver 'tis said,
(This day too, was born, in far North Yarmouth, Maine,
My father; to a life that was not spent in vain.)
Near the divide they drank from a spring, clear and cold
Quite close to one flowing to the west; we are told,
Then camp in the "gem of the mountains"—Idaho,
Whose gold glittering streams to the Pacific flow.
Now to Sacajawea a joyful day comes,
As she meets the Shoshones in their wild wigwam homes,
Glad to greet her own people, and brother most dear,
From whom she was carried a captive, in fear.
Here Clark exploring seventy miles finds the Snake
That he named the Lewis river, if I don't mistake,
But finding no pass he returns to the main camp,
Then all go forward on their wearisome tramp.
And in truth through the mountains blaze a plain trail,
One that in future years would be of avail.
Ere they leave, boats are sunk, and cached are some goods,

Indian horses are bought to pack baggage and foods.
August thirtieth the trail leads o'er the Bitter Root,
A rang never trod before by a white man's foot.
Thence down through a valley bordering the same,
Whose river "The Clark" was called, in honor of his name.
Then they take the Lolo trail for Nez Perce land,
Where horses are left with that brave friendly band.
In canoes the trip down the Clearwater was made
To the Snake, where years after Lewiston's site was laid.
Then on to the lordly Columbia and adown
To the dangerous "Dalles," where precipices frown,
And the river breaks through a "narrows" indeed,
That the canoes shot over with terrific speed.
Soon the Indian village of Wisham was reached,
Where the boats for a time were once more beached.
'Tis now Dalles City, but then, home of those untaught,
Whose children, I'm sure, of the negro knew naught;
For Billy Chinook, then about twelve winters old,
With others, ran in terror, as to me he oft told,
To hide from black York, thought no being on earth;
A scene that must have provoked from the whites, greatest mirth.
Here, as elsewhere, in the "Inland Empire" as 'tis named,
Grows the sweetest flower, they finding made it famed,
They called it "Clarkie Royal" in honor of our Clark,
Its hue is a brilliant pink, deserving of remark.
On down the Columbia, past the "Hood River" we know,
They came to the "Cascades," where angry waters flow
In a mad race to find a home in the rolling deep
Through an entrance in which, largest steamships safely sweep,
Over these rapids boats and men in safety ride,
To a point where the river feels the force of ocean's tide
Along the Cascades and for many miles below
Is found as grand a scenery as any land can show.
Though heeding this, they toil on with more willing hands,
And make camp opposite where Vancouver now stands.
On November the seventh the ocean was seen
With a stretch of the Columbia in between.
Then a glad camp was made, some miles from Clatsop Beach,
And the long wished for goal was now within reach.
Christmas day, seven cabins were finished, pioneer style;
New Year's eve the palisades; for protection the while.
A rude cairn was built near the bold—"Tillamook Head,"
To make salt; of which they had but little, 'tis said.
In this fort they spend a winter, quite rainy, but mild,
With sometimes a storm, when seas were raging and wild,
And their thundering waves could be distinctly heard
From the camp, with the cry of the wildly wheeling sea bird;
But well sheltered and fed in their rude cabin homes
They enjoy themselves until the glad springtime comes.
'Twas here they first learned the Chinook jargon tongue,
One that is still quite often spoken and sung.
A whale on the shore, breaks the dull monotony,
Which faithful Sacajawea was permitted to see.
Dear Fort Clatsop was left on March the twenty-third
And to Chief Cobaway, spoken the last parting word.
Then after some days' journey, at the Sandy they camped
A stream along which many pioneers have tramped.
Hearing of a river they had unheeding passed,
Clark returned and found our bright Willamette, at last.
Then going up a dozen miles, he slept, one night
Not far from our world famed Portland's commanding site.
Here finds a fir tree three hundred and eighteen feet high
In a dark forest, with others standing close by.
Going back to the Sandy camp, the journey was renewed

Past the many places they had already viewed.
Of the homeward journey we need but little tell
Suffice to say they reached Saint Louis safe and well,
September the twenty-third, eighteen hundred and six.
A date that it were well, in memory to fix.
While in the west among the heathen bands,
They told them of God and of His great commands,
And the Indians heard of the white man's Book of Heaven,
And of its saving truths, we call the Gospel leaven.
Years they wait, then some Nez Perces to Saint Louis go
To learn more of this God, and of His teachings know
For many days they searched, till a Christian heard their plaint,
As wearied with their quest their cherished hopes grew faint,
Glad day for them, when two Mission Boards, some teachers sent.
Over a trackless waste, across the continent.
First came the two Lees in eighteen thirty-four
And with them Shepherd, Edwards, and later many more.
In thirty-five came Parker to prepare the way,
When in eighteen thirty-six came Whitman, Spalding, Gray;
And with the two first named was each a loving bride,
First white women to cross Rocky Mountain's divide.
In thirty-eight came Walker, Eells, Smith, and Gray again,
And their heroic brides, with many mountain men.
One of the brides my mother was, who died in ninety-seven—
The last of the Mission bands to go home to heaven.
In the year forty-seven, November twenty-ninth day
The treacherous Cayuses broke forth in deadly fray,
And murdered Doctor Whitman, his wife, and twelve more,
Then followed Indian wars with fighting o'er and o'er.
And for a time the Mission work for years seemed lost
But ~~after~~ after-years brought fruitage that well repaid the cost.
And time has wrought great changes in our grand Northwest.
For countless homes are seen, the brightest and the best,
While cruel savage hordes once on direst murder bent,
All have to peaceful reservation homes been sent.
And Portland, "Rose City" with the Pacific Northwest
Sends the world a greeting for the truest and the best,
And see at the close of a hundred years, by our Willamette bright,
The grand palaces we've built, that captivate the sight;
And in them placed the choicest treasures of all lands,
Wrought by nature, or the workman's skillful hands.
Across "Guild's" lake is built "The Trail" in grandest style,
To honor those who, o'er mountain range, through deep defile,
Or down rivers, turbulent and swift, or frightful cascade,
The journey to the great Pacific Ocean made.
And with all this is seen mountain, forest, river, lake,
That combined, a charming, beautiful landscape make,
While Sacajawea's statue adorns the Fair Grounds.
Through it her fame may reach the earth's remotest bounds.
Hail! glorious country; hail! peerless Oregon,
There is no fairer land that the sun shines upon.
All praise to our God who gave us our great power,
He is our refuge and strength, and our strong tower.

CYRUS H. WALKER.

Albany, Oregon, August 17, 1905.