

## THE LAST BISON.

Eight years have fled since, in the wilderness,  
I drew the rein to rest my comrade there—  
My supple, clean-limbed pony of the plains.  
He was a runner of pure Indian blood,  
Yet in his eye still gleamed the desert's fire,  
And form and action both bespoke the Barb.  
A wondrous creature is the Indian's horse:  
Degenerate now, but from the "Centaur" drawn—  
The furious Fifty which dissolved with fear  
Montezuma's plumed Children of the Sun,  
And shared rough Cortez in his realm of gold!

A gentle vale, with rippling aspens clad,  
Yet open to the breeze, invited rest.  
So there I lay, and watched the sun's fierce beams  
Reverberate in wreathed ethereal flame;  
Or gazed upon the leaves which buzzed o'erhead,  
Like tiny wings in simulated flight.  
Within the vale a lakelet, lashed with flowers,  
Lay like a liquid eye among the hills,  
Revealing in its depths the fulgent light  
Of snowy cloud-land and cerulean skies.  
And rising, falling, fading far around,  
The homeless and unfurrowed prairies spread  
In solitude and idleness eterne.

And all was silence save the rustling leaf,  
The gadding insect, or the grebe's lone cry,  
Or where Saskatchewan, with turbid moan,  
Deep-sunken in the plain, his torrent poured;  
Here Loneliness possessed her realm supreme—  
Her prairies all about her, undeflowered,  
Pulsing beneath the summer sun, and sweet  
With virgin air and waters undefiled.  
Inviolable still! Bright solitudes with power  
To charm the spirit, bruised, where ways are foul,  
Into forgetfulness of chuckling wrong,  
And all the weary clangour of the world.

Yet Sorrow, too, had here its kindred place,  
As o'er my spirit swept the sense of change.  
Here sympathy could sigh o'er man's decay;  
For here, but yesterday, the warrior dwelt  
Whose faded nation had for ages held,  
In fealty to Nature, these domains.  
Around me were the relics of his race—  
The grassy circle where his village stood,  
Well-ruled by customs' immemorial law.  
Along these slopes his happy offspring roved  
In days gone by, and dusky mothers' plied  
Their summer tasks, or loitered in the shade.  
Here the magician howled his demons up,  
And here the lodge of council had its seat,  
Once resonant, with oratory wild.  
All vanished! perished in the swelling sea  
And stayless tide of encroaching power,  
Whose civil fiat, man-devouring still,  
Will leave, at last, no wilding on the earth  
To wonder at or love!

With them had fled  
The bison—breed which overflowed the plains,  
And, undiminished, fed uncounted tribes.  
Its vestiges were here—its wallows, paths,  
And skulls and shining ribs and vertebrae;  
Grey bones of monarchs from the herds, perchance,  
Descended, by De Vaca first beheld,  
Or Coronado, in mad quest of gold.  
Here hosts had had their home; here had they roamed,  
Endless and infinite—vast herds which seemed  
Exhaustless as the sea. All vanished now!  
Of that wild tumult not a hoof remained  
To scour the countless paths where myriads trod.

Long had I lain, 'twixt dreams and waking, thus:  
Musing on change and mutability,  
And endless evanescence, when a burst  
Of sudden roaring filled the vale with sound.  
Perplexed and startled, to my feet I sprang,  
And in amazement from my covert gazed,  
For, presently, into the valley came  
A mighty bison which, with stately tread  
And gleaming eyes, descended to the shore!  
Spell-bound I stood. Was this a living form,  
Or but an image, by the fancy drawn?  
But no—he breathed! and from a wound blood flowed  
And trickled with the frothing from his lips.  
Uneasily he gazed, yet saw me not,  
Haply concealed; then, with a roar so loud,  
That all the echoes rent their valley-horns,  
He stood and listened; but no voice replied!  
Deeply he drank, then lashed his quivering flanks,  
And roared again, and hearkened, but no sound,  
No tongue congenial answered to his call—  
He was the last survivor of his clan!

Huge was his frame! emasculate, so grown  
To that enormous bulk whose presence filled  
The very vale with awe. His shining horns  
Gleamed black amidst his fell of floating hair—  
His neck and shoulders, of the lion's build,  
Were framed to toss the world! Now stood he there,  
And stared, with head uplifted, at the skies,  
Slow-yielding to his deep and mortal wound.  
He seemed to pour his mighty spirit out  
As thus he gazed, till my own spirit burned,  
And teeming fancy, charmed and overwrought  
By all the wildering glamour of the scene,

Gave to that glorious altitude a voice,  
And, rapt, endowed the noble beast with song.

## THE SONG.

Hear me, ye smokeless skies and grass-green earth,  
Since by your suzerance still I breathe and live!  
Through you fond Nature gave me birth  
And food and freedom—all she had to give.  
Enough! I grew, and with my kindred ranged  
Their realm stupendous, changeless, and unchanged,  
Save by the toll of nations primitive,  
Who throve on us, and loved our life-stream's roar,  
And lived beside its wave, and camped upon its shore.

They loved us, and they wasted not. They slew,  
With pious hand, but for their daily need;  
Not wantonly, but as the due  
Of stern necessity which Life doth breed.  
Yea, even as earth gave us herbage meet,  
So yielded we, in turn, our substance sweet  
To quit the claims of hunger, not of greed.  
So stood it with us that what either did  
Could not be on the earth foregone, nor Heaven forbid.

And, so, companioned in the blameless strife  
Enjoined upon all creatures, small and great,  
Our ways were venial and our life  
Ended in fair fulfilment of our fate.  
No gold to them by sordid hands were passed;  
No greedy herdsman housed us from the blast.  
Ours was the liberty of regions rife,  
In winter's snow, in summer's fruits and flowers—  
Ours were the virgin prairies, and their rapture ours!

So fared it with us both; yea, thus it stood  
In all our wanderings from place to place,  
Until the red man mixed his blood  
With paler currents. Then arose a race—  
The reckless hunters of the plains—who vied  
In wanton slaughter for the tongue and hide,  
To satisfy vain ends and longings base.  
This grew; and yet we flourished, and our name  
Prospered until the pale destroyer's concourse came.

Then fell a double terror on the plains,  
The swift inspreding of destruction dire—  
Strange men who ravaged our domains,  
On every hand, and ringed us round with fire;  
Pale enemies who slew with equal mirth  
The harmless or the hurtful things of earth,  
In dead fruition of their mad desire:  
The ministers of mischief and of might,  
Who yearn for havoc as the world's supreme delight.

So waned the myriads which had waxed before  
When subject to the simple needs of men.  
As yields to eating seas the shore,  
So yielded our vast multitude, and then—  
It scattered! Meagre bands, in wild dismay,  
Were parted and, for shelter, fled away  
To barren wastes, to mountain gorge and glen.  
A respite brief from stern pursuit and care,  
For still the spoiler sought, and still he slew us there.

Hear me, thou grass-green earth, ye smokeless skies,  
Since by your suzerance still I breathe and live!  
The charity which man denies  
Ye still would tender to the fugitive!  
I feel your mercy in my veins; at length  
My heart revives, and strengthens with your strength.  
Too late, too late, the courage ye would give!  
Naught can avail these wounds, this failing breath,  
This frame which feels, at last, the wily touch of death.

Here must the last of all his kindred fall;  
Yet, midst these gathering shadows, ere I die—  
Responsive to an inward call,  
My spirit fain would rise and prophesy.  
I see our spoilers build their cities great  
Upon our plains—I see their rich estate:  
The centuries in dim procession fly!  
Long ages roll, and then at length is bared  
The time when they who spared not are no longer spared.

Once more my vision sweeps the prairies wide,  
But now no peopled cities greet the sight;  
All perished, now, their pomp and pride:  
In solitude the wild wind takes delight.  
Naught but the vacant wilderness is seen,  
And grassy mounds where cities once had been.  
The earth smiles as of yore, the skies are bright,  
Wild cattle graze and bellow on the plain,  
And savage nations roam o'er native wilds again!

The burden ceased, and now, with head bowed down,  
The bison smelt, then grinned into the air.  
An awful anguish seized his giant frame,  
Cold shudderings and in-drawn gaspings deep—  
The spasms of illimitable pain.  
One stride he took, and sank upon his knees,  
Glared stern defiance where I stood revealed,  
Then swayed to earth, and, with convulsive groan,  
Turned heavily upon his side, and died.

Prince Albert, N.W.T. C. MAIR.

NOTE.—The foregoing poem was suggested to the author by a personal incident, near the elbow of the North Saskatchewan, some eight years ago. Not a buffalo, so far as the author knows, has been seen on that river since. There are some animals in private collections; a small band, perhaps, exists in the fastnesses of Montana, and a few wood buffaloes still roam the Mackenzie River region; but the wild bison of the plains may now be looked upon as extinct.

ing. Dwight has become conscious that Enid is looking at him—she doesn't realize it herself—and he asks her if she has recovered from her fright. With an effort Enid arouses herself to reply and explain how she came into such peril. "But I cannot imagine," she adds, "how the boat got loose. There was no one in sight but my brother's setter—there he is now, running along the shore. Besides, who could be either foolish or malicious enough to do such a thing!"

Charlie Dwight picks up the stake which has been dragging in the water at the end of the chain, and examines it. "Look!" he exclaims triumphantly, "It is all gnawed around the top. The dog has pulled it up, and the water has thus loosened the boat. But why didn't you use the oars?" he asks wonderingly.

"I don't know how to row," is the doleful reply.

"Then you must learn," he says decisively. "You told me last week," he continues, with a tinge of humorousness, "that you wished me to row you about the river, and this morning you know —"

"Oh," interrupts Enid, the paleness of her cheeks giving way to a faint flush, "it was a mistake—what must you have thought—my brother told me—how can I explain?" she falters.

"Don't explain, it isn't necessary," he replies, "but please let me say that I shall be delighted to row you about the river, and at the same time teach you the use of the oars if you will allow me. Your brother will vouch for me, I have no doubt. I have met him frequently," he adds, a smile lighting up his dark, serious face. "Will that arrangement suit you?"

"Oh yes, certainly," Enid says, striving to regain her self possession, "but how can I ever repay you for what you have done for me!"

"By learning to pull a good stroke," laughs Dwight, as the bow of the red boat grates on the shore.

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When the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen held its annual regatta, Enid Birkett wore the Lachine colours and watched the "senior fours" with breathless interest which gave place to unspeakable delight when Charlie Dwight's crew gained a splendid victory.

"That young lady in blue appears to take a great interest in the races," observed some one.

"Naturally," replied some one else. "She is engaged to the stroke of the Lachine four!"

HELEN FAIRBARN.

## A SAMPLE OF MONTAGNAIS.

On the occasion of his recent visit to Lake St. John, His Excellency the Governor-General was presented by Mr. Commins, agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, on behalf of the company, with a couple of magnificent bearskins and a splendid birch bark canoe. The Montagnais Indians of Pointe Bleue presented the Governor with the following address in their own language:—

*Tshe etshimau kaisewal shet,*  
Usham ni mirueritenan tshi petamats emijikain  
mametshitiskeum, tshi ntuspamokots ote ntshis-  
katats, kassine etamiskatats ki mak e naskumitats.

Ome eshijueiats nileinats ofsiparo tie tshetshishisserimiats ushknats mishimik no.

Tshil ka miskupapistut tshetshishimaskneue ni-  
mierueritenan e napamitats, alo tshisserimitsits  
Tshipesnau ote tshishitiskueum, miam Tshe Otehis-  
maskueu itaelkakust.

Ustunil eakum kie uir tshetshishishatshiakant  
eokum ispish uilatats,

N tan eliniuiats,  
Kamistuiats, 22 etsnisluaskant epopushum 1888.

Translated into English, the address would read somewhat as follows:

"May it please your Excellency—Great Chief of the generous heart:—The news that you were coming, with your noble spouse, to visit the Montaganais filled us with joy. This is why we are all here to meet and salute you. Thanks. This word is in our hearts, and is written on the bark to prove our sincerity. Representative of the Queen, you are welcome amongst us."