

dreds of thousands. Dante's "Thick as the Leaves in Vallambrosa" and some of the classical descriptions of the hordes of locusts seem the only fitting comparisons for their vast numbers. Col. R. I. Dodge, in "Plains of the Great West," gives a graphic picture of a great herd through which he passed while driving from Old Fort Zara to Fort Larned in Arkansas in 1871. This herd was not less than 25 miles wide and 50 miles deep. It took five days in passing a given point. Looked at from an eminence, Col. Dodge says the whole vast space appeared to be one slow moving compact mass which completely covered the ground, drifting across the plain like a dark, irregular cloud. This was one of the last of the great herds. A careful estimate of its numbers shows that it probably comprised 4,000,000 buffalo and this was only one herd. Mr. Wm. Blackmore, an early westerner, quoted in the Great Plains of the West, said,—"In the autumn of 1868, whilst crossing the plains on the Kansas Pacific Railroad for a distance of upwards of 20 miles, between Ellsworth and Sheridan, we passed through an almost unbroken herd of buffalo. The plains were blackened with them, and more than once the train had to stop to allow unusually large herds to pass. In 1872, whilst on a scout for about a hundred miles south of Fort Dodge to the Indian Territory, we were never out of sight of buffalo."

"Unlike any other quadrupeds that ever lived" says Hornaday, "they lived and moved in great multitudes like grand armies on review." And like armies once in motion they went on regardless of everything. Boats, locomotives, trains of cars which came in their way—nothing halted their advance. It is said that after the train on one of the prairie roads had been derailed twice in one week by herds of buffalo, the engineer learned to bring the train to a stop until they had passed. It was this instinct for solidarity, coupled with an almost total absence of fear that helped to make their annihilation so fatally easy.



Herd of Buffalo in Buffalo Park, Wainwright, Alberta.

Systematic Slaughter.

The disappearance of the buffalo from the east was an inevitable result of the march of civilization. As the country became settled the buffalo gradually disappeared. He was the most valuable food animal procurable by the early settler and as soon as the consumption exceeded the natural increase, the buffalo was bound to go. Its extermination on the plains is a different story and a less creditable one. Up to the year 1820 although the buffalo had been gradually driven westwards and both Indians and whites had hunted it steadily for meat and robes, no serious inroads had been made on the western herds. About that year, however, the slaughter began to be systematic and organized. Trading posts were established at various points near the best hunting grounds and the Indians were encouraged to kill as many buffaloes as possible for their robes. About this

time, too, began the famous Red River hunting expeditions, the annual buffalo hunt by which the Red River settlers secured their winter's provisions. Up till then buffalo had been so plentiful that when a settler wanted to stock the winter larder all he had to do was to drive out on the prairie and shoot down what he required and bring it home. Now, however, the buffalo were growing scarcer in Manitoba and organized expeditions prepared to go a long distance had to be fitted out. The first great hunt was made in 1820. It comprised 540 carts, put together without a nail, with tires of stretched buffalo skin and a squeak which could be heard a mile away. The long train of carts trekking across the prairies must have made an imposing spectacle and if the buffalo had been a timid or sagacious animal the noise would undoubtedly have given him ample warning to get away to safety. Unfortunately he was not. Alexander Ross in his "Red River Settlement" shows how the number of carts assembled for the annual hunt increased. In 1825 he says the expedition numbered 680 carts, with Indians, settlers and half-breeds. In 1830 there were 820. In 1835 the number had increased to 970 and in 1840 to 1,210. As Hornaday says, the army which finally went forth to slaughter the buffalo was larger than that with which Cortez subdued an empire. By 1846 it was necessary to divide it into two divisions. One, the White Horse Plains Division, went west by the Asiniboine; the other, the Red River Division south to Pem-



Indians Hunting Buffalo in the Old Days.