

62 84
24
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P#2

THE PROTECTION OF THE WILD

We smashed him and moved on. The wild things that peopled the prairie smelled blood and bolted, north and south.

In the wake of the trail-blazers and road-builders, came the adventurers, and alleged sportsmen, galloping beside the clumsy cattle of the plain, carbinging them and killing them for their tongues and sometimes merely for pastime.

And by the time the pathfinders had dragged their chain to the sundown sea, the builders had bridged the continent, and the first flag stations began to dot the desert of the Far West; in short, when the white man had opened the first steel trail to the Pacific, there was not a living thing worth mentioning in rifle-range of the right of way.

And this all happened but yesterday, General Granville M. Dodge, the Chief Engineer of the first Pacific Railway, may be seen at his office, No. 1 Broadway, most any day.

The last spike, connecting the Union and Central Pacific was driven in May, 1868. Then came other builders setting stakes along the old Santa Fe trail, and yet other builders building the Northern Pacific, and by the time these lines were completed it was all over with Lo and the buffalo. Somewhere I have seen two paintings, one showing a buffalo bull smelling a grade stake, the second the finished line, and by the road side great heaps of bleaching buffalo bones waiting to be freighted to the refineries, back in "God's Country," as they called the place from which the killer came.

I would not belittle the builder, or rob him of the fame he has won. He is, in fact, my special hero, as all who have read my books will attest, but it is an everlasting shame that the west could not have been won without losing the best of it all.

I have always believed that the war had a lot to do with the slaughter of the wild. A large majority of the men engaged in the construction of the first railway to bridge what was then called the Great American Desert, were ex-soldiers who seemed to take a savage delight in slaying every living thing that crossed their trail. The "dead-shot" City Marshal, the border ruffian and the professional bad man were the natural product of the bitter seed sown in that seething hell called the "Civil War."