

## How the Bison Perished.

One of the most extraordinary events that has characterized the last half of the present century is the extermination, the wiping out, of the American bison. There is little use in resorting to invective or endeavoring to stigmatize those who are guilty of this crime, but it would be well if the acts could be held up in a bright light, that those who committed them might be exorcised in the time to come, when a few bones and pictures will alone tell the story of a mighty race swept from the face of the earth by the civilized people of the nineteenth century.

"In 1870 and later," said an army officer to the writer, "the plains were alive with bison, and in crossing at places I had difficulty in avoiding them, so vast were the herds. If any one had told me then that in twenty or thirty years they would have become almost entirely extinct, I should have regarded the statement as that of an insane person."

That so many of these animals could have been killed in mere wantonness seems incredible when their vast numbers are realized. We first hear of the bison from Cortez and his followers in 1521. Montezuma had one in zoological garden, the specimen in all probability, having been caught in Coahuila. In 1580 Cabrera saw them in Texas; and 1642 Coronado found a herd in what is now the Indian Territory one of his officers describing them as horrible beasts that demoralized the horses. In 1612 Sir Samuel Argoll observed herds of bison near the national capital, and in all probability, 287 years ago herds of bison grazed on the site of the capital building at Washington. In 1678 Father Hennepin observed them in what is now northern Illinois, and in October, 1729, Col. W. Bird saw herds in North Carolina and Virginia.

These and other facts have provided data by which the early geographical distribution of the bison has been determined, and it is known that this grand animal, that is today represented by a few individuals, formerly ranged in millions from the Atlantic seaboard to the Gulf of Mexico, from Texas to the Great Slave Lake, and as far west as Central Nevada. As to their numbers, they were like the sands on the seashore, and the accounts given by those who hunted them twenty or thirty years ago, today seem like vagaries of a disordered imagination. Mr. Hornaday, who has hunted in South and Central Africa, where game is remarkably plentiful, states that the bison of this country previous to 1870 exceeded, in all probability, all the African game of every kind. An army officer in service on the plains in 1867 stated to the writer that on one occasion he was surrounded by buffaloes, and that from the top of a small hill he could see nothing but a black mass of their bodies. It was impossible to estimate their numbers, and the party were in great fear lest they should be caught in a stampede, the rush being irresistible. Col. Dodge, in his memoirs, states that on one occasion he rode twenty-five miles in Arkansas, always being in a herd of buffaloes, or many small herds, with but a small separating strip between them. The animals paid but little attention to him, merely moving slowly out of the way or advancing, bringing the whole herd of thousands down on him with the roar of an avalanche. This he met by standing fast and firing when they came within short range, the shot causing them to divide. In one day Col. Dodge killed twenty six bison from his wagon; not in sport, but as a protection. Otherwise they would have run him down and crushed man, horse and wagon.

This herd observed by Col. Dodge was later found to be fifty miles wide and to occupy five days in passing a given point on its way north. From a high rock, from which points ten miles distant could be seen in every direction, the earth seemed to be covered with bison. To make an accurate estimate of the numbers seen would be impossible, but Mr. Hornaday by a conservative calculation, estimates that Col. Dodge must have seen four hundred and eighty thousand, and that the herd comprised half a million buffaloes. A train on the Kansas Pacific road in that state in 1868 passed between the towns of Elsworth and Sheridan—120 miles—through a continuous herd of buffaloes. They were packed so that the earth was black, and more than once the train was stopped, the surging mass becoming a menace to human safety.

"You cannot believe the facts as they existed in the days 1871-72," said an army officer. "I was at that time on duty in the

pay department which made it necessary for me to travel on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad. One day the train entered a large herd, which scattered and seemed to go wild at the shrieking of the whistle and the ringing of the bell. As we went on the thicker they became until the very earth appeared to be a rolling mass of humps so far as we could see. Suddenly some of the animals nearest us turned and charged; others fell in behind, and down on us they came like an avalanche. The engineer stopped the engine, let off steam and whistled to stop them, while we fired from the platforms and windows with rifles and revolvers, but it was like trying to stay a tidal wave. We stood in the centre of the car to await the crash, some of the men going to the rear. On they came, the earth trembling, and plunged heads down into us. Some were wedged in between the cars, others beneath; and so great was the crush that they toppled three cars over and actually scrambled over them, one buffalo becoming bogged by having his legs caught in the window. Such accidents occurred several times, and twice in one week were trains derailed by charging buffaloes, whose numbers it was impossible to compute.

Hunters have heard the roaring of buffaloes at a distance of from three to five miles, and that the earth trembled when they charged we can well imagine when the large bulls are known to weigh 2,000 pounds, the cows 1,200 pounds. The question of interest today is how was it possible to destroy so many animals in so short a time and what methods were employed. The natural fatalities were few compared to the enormous numbers. The cow bison displays little affection for her young, and many calves were lost every year, but, all in all, the conditions were extremely favorable to them, and their increase was enormous. Many were destroyed by stampeding over precipices. In 1867, 9,000 buffaloes, or half a herd, became entangled in the quicksands of the Platte River. At another time a herd was lost by breaking through the ice of Lac Qui Parle in Minnesota. The cold winters sometimes killed many that remained in the far North; but these dan-

gers were as nothing compared to man. Man soon found that the buffaloes had a value. The Indians slaughtered them by the thousands for their skins, bone and for food; they killed 100 oftentimes to secure five, and waste and prodigality were the rule. Yet so vast were their numbers that doubtless the Indian invasions upon them had little effect as far as extermination was concerned. But with the white man it was different. Some wished to make records, and killed for sport; some killed for the hides and heads; some became professional buffalo butchers to provide the gangs of railroad men with meat, slaughtering a magnificent animal for its tongue alone. It has been estimated that previous to 1870 nearly three quarters of a million buffaloes could have been killed yearly and the herds kept intact; how many were killed and wasted will never be known. Each animal, however, had a value at this time estimated by Hornaday at \$5, the robe \$3.50, the tongue, 25 cents, hind-quarter meat \$2, bones, horn and hoofs, 25 cents and this was sufficient to attract an army of destroyers. The hides the greatest feature, and one firm in New York between 1876 and 1884 paid the killers nearly \$1,000,000, or, to be exact, \$923,070 for the robes and hides, which represents the final extinction of the animal. The government never interfered, owing to protests of interested legislators and the neglect of higher officials. Another firm paid \$216,000 for robes and skins and there were scores of private traders in the field. The word went out to kill everything in sight, and from 1876 there was a price on the head of every buffalo.

It is a dark and disagreeable subject to probe, but it is interesting to note some of the methods of these national calamity makers. A band of half breeds in two hunts, according to Rose, killed 47,770 buffaloes, 620 men being engaged in the sport, out of which about 30,000 animals were wasted or partly eaten. Hornaday estimates that from 1820 to 1826 five buffalo expeditions went out, composed of 610 carts each, killing 118,960 buffaloes. From 1826 to 1830 five expeditions of 750 carts each, killed 146,250 buffaloes. From 1830 to 1835 six expeditions, of 895 carts, killed 174,628 animals. From 1835 to 1840 fifty-four expeditions, of 1,090 carts each, killed 212,560 buffaloes. Total number killed by the Red River half-breeds alone in twenty years 652,375 valued at \$3,261,375. An interesting table has been furnished the Government by the firm previously mentioned, J. & I. Bo kowitz, showing the decline of the buffalo as an article of commerce. It shows

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that in nine years this firm handled 246, 173 skins, costing \$924,790. In 1878 they received 41,268 robes; in 1883, 5,000; in 1884 none. The end had come, and the buffalo was a memory. Another dealer, Joseph Ullman states that in 1881 he handled 41,000 robes, valued at \$1,000 robes, valued at \$3.50, and 12,000 at \$7.50. In 1882 he purchased 40,000 hides at \$8.50 and 10,000 robes at \$8.50. The prices hunters received were: Cow hide, \$3; bull hide, \$3.50; yearling, \$1.50; calves, 50 cents. The expense of transportation brought the hide up to \$3.59 in New York. This dealer in four years paid out \$310,000 to these men, who killed buffaloes by the tens of thousands for \$2.50 a head. Both of the above mentioned dealers in eight years paid out \$1,233,070 to the exterminators.

That the real extermination of the buffalo was caused by the demands of trade there can be no doubt, aided and abetted by sportsmen, Indians, and others; but the blame really lies with the government that in all these years permitted a few ignorant Congressmen to block the legislation in favor of the protection of the bison so that all the efforts of humanitarians were defeated and the hills when passed pigeon-holed.

There were many methods of extermination that are graphically illustrated by paintings and models in the Smithsonian institution. The still hunter was the most insidious enemy of the buffalo, and a single man by sneaking upon a herd has been known to kill 1,000 in a single season. One Capt. Jack Bridges, of Kansas, has the honorable record of having killed 1,142 buffaloes in six weeks. He took the contract to that effect and bagged his game. Up to 1870 there were undoubtedly severed millions of buffaloes alive, but the lust for blood was on, and soon came the demand for robes and hides from the dealers, and men who could not make a living at anything else went out to kill

buffaloes. In the different States there were regular killing outfits that cost, in rifles, horses, carts, etc., from \$2,000 to \$5,000. Such methods developed some famous characters. Buffalo Bill was one. He contracted with the Kansas Pacific Railroad to furnish them with all the buffalo the men could eat as the road was built and, according to Mr. Cody's statement they ate 4,280 buffaloes in eighteen months for which he received \$500 per month, the price he paid for his title.

Many buffaloes were killed by running them down; this was the popular method among the Indians who shot them with rifle or bow and arrow, or chased them over precipices. The great herds north of the Missouri were mostly exterminated by the Indians of the Manitoba Red River settlement, who hunted in a regular army. One division of such an army of exterminators consisted of 603 carts, 700 half-breeds, 200 Indians, 900 horses, 200 oxen and 400 dogs. The movements against the buffaloes in Nebraska were often made by 3,000 people, and as each man killed at least ten, 30,000 buffaloes bit the dust. In this way Indians as above killed, it is estimated, 653,000 buffaloes.

The completion of the western railroads divided the buffaloes into two herds, northern and southern. In 1871 the southern herd was composed of an estimated 8,000,000, and from now on the animals dropped away so rapidly that it was estimated that 8,000 or 4,000 a day were killed. It became evident that they were doomed and appeals were made to the government by hundreds. From 1873 to 1874 there were 1,780,461 buffaloes killed and wasted; 3,168,780 in all killed by white people and the skins shipped east over the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe road. During the same time the Indians killed 890,000; besides these settlers and mounted Indians killed 150,000, so that the grand sum total for these years was 3,698,780. In the following year, 1875, the deed was done. The southern herd had been swept from the face of the earth; the northern herd went in the same way. In 1882 it was believed there were 1,000,000 buffaloes alive in the herd, but there were at least 5,000 white hunters in the field shooting them down at every point. Such a merciless war of extermination was never before witnessed in a civilized land. Then came 1883; thousands took the field this year and Sitting Bull and some whites had the honor of killing at last ten thousand.

There were living at the government census, made eight years ago, 256 pure-blooded buffaloes in captivity, the last of the untold millions that covered this continent during the past century.

#### Carrying Money.

It is interesting to note the various methods in which men of different nationalities carry their worldly wealth. The Englishman carries gold silver and copper all loose in his trouser's pocket, pulls out a handful of the mixture in an opulent way, and selects the coin he needs.

The American carries his "wad of bills" in a long, narrow pocketbook, in which the greenbacks lie flat. The Frenchman makes use of a leather purse with no distinguishing characteristic. The German uses one gaily embroidered in silks by the fair hands of some Lottchen.

The half civilized capitalist from some torrid South American city carries his dollars in a belt with cunningly devised pockets to baffle the gentlemen with the light fingers. Some of these belts are very expensive. The Italian of the poorer classes ties up his little fortune in a gaily colored handkerchief secured with many knots, which he adorns in some mysterious manner about his clothes.

A similar course has charms for the Spaniard, while the lower class Russian exhibits a preference for his boots or the lining of his clothes as a hiding place for his savings.

#### The Flight of the Sun.

The latest calculation of the velocity and direction of the sun's motion in space is by Prof. Simon Newcomb. He estimates that the solar system is being carried in a northerly direction of 16 1/2 kilometres—a little over ten miles—per second. The point toward which we are moving is within a few degrees of the extraordinarily bright star Vega in the constellation of Lyra.

An Inflexible Deity—Pinkie told me he knew a Britisher who had a Hindoo servant who used to offer prayer every day before the gas meter.

I'll bet a dollar he didn't propitiate it.



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