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The Protection of the Wild and The Things of the Wild

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Address given by Cy Warman
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THE saddest story in the history of the United States, save that of the Civil War, is the story of the West; and the saddest chapter is the one that tells of the wanton waste and utter destruction of the wild life of that delightful land. Trees and animals always fascinated me, and yet, when I look back upon my bare-foot days, it seems to me that they were regarded generally as things to be cut down and killed. No one, not even George Washington, seems to have spared the tree. The first animal story to stick and stay in my memory, was of a red deer, surprised one sunrise in our little stump-fenced garden, clearing the stumps and racing away to the woods. As often as I recall my boyhood I seem to see myself limping up through life with one suspender and a stone-bruise looking for a wild deer. In all probability, if I had found it, I would have killed it, though the last of its race.

The fact that my father was able to locate his Mexican War land grant in Illinois in 1850 would seem to indicate that the frontier was not far away, but the deer were gone when I arrived. And yet, the quick passing of the deer was like a lingering illness compared with the cruel swiftness with which the big game perished on the plains.

To me, the conquest of the West was a tragedy. The Civil War postponed it for half a decade, but it had to come. At the close of that carnage we came red-handed from the slaughter at the South and went at the West. There were few preliminaries, and no parley. We simply swam the Big Water and possessed the plains. The Red Man, the hereditary Lord of the Land, stood up and demanded recognition.