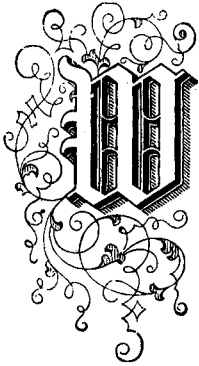


ONCE MONARCH OF THE PRAIRIES.



WHEN first the great discoverers of this continent began to penetrate far inland, they found an animal well worthy of mention in the history of America. The bison or the buffalo, as he was more commonly called, existed in countless

herds from the great prairies of the North-West Territories to the wilds of Texas. The animal has been spoken of and described by a great many early historians. The first graphic description of it is due to the great explorer, Father Marquette. An early mention of it is found in the records of the Conquest of Mexico; Montezuma points out the buffalo to Hernando Cortez, as being a rare animal in the south, although very common in the north.

Notwithstanding the important part it has had in the early history of our country, many persons in the United States and Canada have never seen a full-grown buffalo. Those exhibited in travelling shows and circuses are usually poor specimens of this magnificent animal. It resembles in many respects the European buffalo; with this vast difference that the latter animal inhabits the mountainous parts of Europe, whilst the American buffalo belongs exclusively to the prairies. Another difference is in their appearance, the bison being more low-set and having a much shorter mane than the buffalo. In many respects the bison resembles our domestic cattle though he is much larger, a full-grown male being about twice the size of an ox.

Under the neck hangs a heavy growth of hair and the whole head, neck and shoulders are covered with a great brown mane like that of a horse. This mane is sometimes a foot long, and falling over the animal's eyes gives them a hideous and savage appearance. The rest of the body is covered with brown curly hair like the wool of a sheep, though much

stronger and thicker. The bison also has quite a large hump on his back, which tends to make him appear exceedingly large and formidable. A peculiar fact about the way in which the hair falls over the eyes is that it prevents the animal from seeing, while in the act of charging or flying from foes. He will make wild charges upon his assailants and pass quite close without doing the least harm; or when pursued whole herds have been known to dash over precipices or into obstacles without deviating a particle from their onward course.

Accounts of the numbers of these animals which once roamed over the prairies of the great North-West are truly astonishing, and it should be a subject of deep regret that of the grandest animal of our continent but five hundred representatives remain. From the notes of celebrated travellers we learn that thousands upon thousands of them were annually slaughtered to supply the wants of the Indians and early settlers. It is claimed by certain hunters that in one especially good season, they travelled for twenty days on horseback through a continuous herd, "seeing nothing but skies and bison for miles together," the prairie being litterly black with them. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at, that so many of the early settlers adopted the peltry trade to acquire wealth, and thus commenced the war of extermination upon the buffalo.

So given up to the chase were the inhabitants of the plains that the buffalo-hunt was the mainstay of whole communities. The Indian lived entirely by it, and it was the life of the famous Red River Settlement and of remote and isolated places in both the United States and Canada. These annual hunts, however, never caused any remarkable decrease in the herds. It was not until the great Canadian Pacific Railway began to find its way across the continent that the extermination of the monarch of the prairies began, for by this enterprise all the difficulties of transportation were success-