

and it is safe to say that there never were two human beings more thoroughly perforated, more persistently punctured and intensely irritated with flea bites than were the two guests at Mabins' ranch during all that long and agonizing night. However, there came an end to the darkness and the attempt at sleep, and after an early breakfast we resumed the Fort Kearneyward journey to arrive at its end in the late afternoon of the fourth day.

FORT KEARNEY IN 1861.

There I found Colonel Alexander, of the regular army, in command. John Heth, of Virginia, was the sutler for the post and after some consultation and advisement it was determined that we might without much danger from Indians go south to the Republican river for a buffalo hunt. At that time the Cheyennes, who were a blood-thirsty tribe, were in arms against the white people and yearning for their scalps wherever found. But to avoid or mitigate dangers Colonel Alexander considerably detailed Lieutenant Bush with twelve enlisted men, all soldiers of experience in the Indian country, to go with us to the Republican valley as an escort or guard—in military parlance, on detached service. Thus our party moved southward with ample force of arms for its defence.

The four hunters of the expedition were Lieutenant Bush, John Heth, John Talbot (who had been honorably discharged from the regular army after some years of service) and myself. The excursion was massed and ready for departure at 8 o'clock on the bright morning of October 6, 1861. The course taken was nearly due south from the present site of Kearney city in Buffalo county. The expedition consisted of two large army wagons, four mules attached to each wagon, a light, two-horse spring wagon and four trained riding horses experienced in the chase, together with twelve soldiers of the regular U. S. army and the gentlemen already named. It had not traveled more than twenty-five miles south of Kearney before it came upon view of an immense and seemingly uncountable herd of buffalo.

FIRST SIGHT OF BUFFALOES.

My first sight of these primitive beebes of the plains I shall never forget. They were so distant that I could not make out their individual forms and I at once jumped to the conclusion that they were only an innumerable lot of crows sitting about upon the knobs and hillocks of the prairies. But in a few moments, when we came nearer, they materialized and were, sure enough, real bellowing, snorting wallowing buffaloes. At first they appeared to give no heed to our outfit, but after we saddled and mounted our horses and rode into their midst they began to scatter and to form into small bands, single file. The herd separated into long, black swaying strings and each

string was headed by the best meat among its numbers. The leading animal was generally a three-year-old cow. Each of these strings, or single-file bands, ran in a general southeast direction and each of the four hunters—Bush, Heth, Talbot and the writer—selected a string and went for the pre-eminent animal with enthusiasm, zeal and impulsive foolhardiness.

In the beginning of the pell-mell, hurry-scurry race it seemed that it would be very easy to speedily overtake the desired individual buffalo that we intended to shoot and kill. The whole band seemed to run leisurely. They made a sort of sidewise gait, a movement such as one often sees in a dog running ahead of a wagon on a country road. Upon the level prairie we made very perceptible gains upon them, but when a declivity was reached and we made a down hill gallop we were obliged to rein in and hold up the horses, or take the chances of a broken leg or neck by being ditched in a badger or wolf hole. But the Buffaloes with their heavy shoulders and huge hair-matted heads lumbered along down the inclines with great celerity, gaining so much upon us that every now and then one of them would drop out from the line upon reaching an attractive depression, roll over two or three times in his "wallow," jump up and join his fleeing fellows before we could reach him.

But finally after swinging and swaying hither and thither with the band or line as it swayed and swung, the lead animal was reached and with much exultation and six very nervous shots put to death. My trophy proved to be a buffalo cow of two or three years of age; and after she had dropped to the ground, a nimble calf, about three months old, evidently her progeny, began making circles around and around the dead mother and bleating pitifully, enlarging the circle each time, until at last it went out of sight onto the prairie and alone, all the other parts of the herd having scattered beyond the rising bluffs and far away.

SAVAGE ENTHUSIASM.

That afternoon was fuller of tense excitement, savage enthusiasm, zeal and barbaric ambition than any other that could be assorted from my life of more than sixty years. There was a certain amount of ancestral heathenism aroused in every man, spurring a horse to greater swiftness, in that chase for large game. And there was imperial exultation of the primitive barbaric instinct when the game fell dead and its whooping captors surrounded its breathless carcass.

WASTE.

But the wastefulness of the buffalo hunter of those days was wicked beyond description and, because of its utter recklessness of the future, wholly unpardonable. Only the hump ribs, the tongue and perhaps now and then one hind quarter were saved for use from

each animal. The average number of pounds of meat saved from the buffaloes killed between the years 1860 and 1870 would not exceed twenty. In truth, thousands of buffaloes were killed merely to get their tongues and pelts. The inexcusable and unnecessary extermination of those beef-producing and very valuable fur-bearing animals only illustrates the extravagance of thoughtlessness and mental nearsightedness in the American people when dealing with practical and far-reaching questions. It also demonstrates, in some degree, the incapacity of the ordinary every-day law-makers of the United States. Game laws have seldom been enacted in any of the states before the virtual extinction of the game they purposed to protect. Here in Nebraska among big game were many hundreds of thousands of buffaloes, tens of thousands of elk and deer and antelope, while among smaller game the wild turkey and the prairie chicken were innumerable. But today Nebraska game is practically extinct. Even the prairie chicken and the wild turkey are seldom found anywhere along the Missouri river bluffs in the southern and eastern part of the commonwealth.

Looking back: what might have been accomplished for the conservation of game in the trans-Missouri country is suggested so forcibly that one wonders at the stupendous stupidity which indolently permitted its destruction.

TURKEY CREEK.

The first night outward and southeastward from Kearney we came to Turkey Creek which empties into the Republican river. There, after dark, tents were pitched at a point near the place where the government had in previous years established kilns and burned lime for the use of soldiers in building quarters for themselves and the officers at Fort Kearney which was constructed in 1847 by Stewart L. Van Vliet, now a retired brigadier general and the oldest living graduate of West Point. After a sumptuous feast of buffalo steak, a strong pint of black coffee and a few pipes of good tobacco, our party retired; sleep came with celerity and the camp was peacefully at rest, with the exception of two regular soldiers who stood guard until 12 o'clock, and were then relieved by two others who kept vigil until sunrise. At intervals I awoke during the night and listened to the industrious beavers building dams on the creek. They were shoveling mud with their trowel-shaped tails into the crevices of their dams with a constantly-resounding slapping and splashing all night. The architecture of the beaver is not unlike that which follows him and exalts itself in the chinked and daubed cabins of the pioneers.

THE VALLEY OF GAME.

The darkness was followed by a dawn of beauty and breakfast came soon thereafter, and for the first time my eyes looked out upon the attractive, fertile and beautiful valley of the Repub-