THE LAST OF THE BUFFALOES.

The Herd in the Yellowstone Rapidly Disappearing, and Congress Asked to Bring It to Washington.

Less Than One Hundred Buffaloes Left in the United States—What a Buffalo is Worth and How They Are Hunted—The Millions of the Past—The Great Southern Herd and Its Four Million Buffaloes—How They Were Killed—Shooting Buffaloes by Horse Power and Shooting Them for Pleasure—The Destruction of the Northern Herds—How Men Made Fortunes in Buffalo Robes—Buffalo Bones and What They Bring—The Desecration of the Buffalo and Something About the Half-Breeds.

Special Correspondence of the NEWS.
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THE scientists of Washington are much alarmed at the possible extinction of the buffalo. Mr. Langley, the head of the Smithsonian Institution, does not think that there are as many as ten buffaloes left in the United States. There are a few here in the National Park, and a small herd at Philadelphia. Austin Corbin, the New York millionaire, had several, and it may be that there are some small scattering herds in different parts of the west. Of these, however, the Smithsonian Institution has no record, and such as exist are probably half-breeds. The only pure buffaloes outside of the above are those of the Yellowstone Park, which two years ago numbered about 300 head, and which are now reduced to fifty. Mr. Langley has just received letters stating that ten of these animals have been killed within the past four months, and that the others are in danger. The chances are that they will last only a short time, and Congress has been notified that if something is not done at once the wonderful animal will disappear from the face of the earth. There are no other buffaloes on the earth but these. The small herds of the east cannot be ready to perpetuate the buffalo without inbreeding, which will deteriorate the species, and its only salvation is the bringing of these from the Yellowstone Park to some point where they can be carefully watched and cared for.

It is Mr. Langley's idea that they should be brought to Washington, and put in the National Zoological Park here. The main purpose of purchasing this park was for the protection of such things as the buffalo and other American animals liable to become extinct. It contains plenty of ground for a good buffalo park, and if these buffaloes can be put in it they will serve as a nucleus for the raising of buffaloes, which can be supplied to the different zoological gardens of the United States and furnished to colonies of them over the country, by which the species can be perpetuated. Professor Goode, the head of the National Museum, says that we ought to have at least 100 buffaloes in order to maintain the species, and that there should be herds in different sections of the country, the animals of which might be interchanged to prevent the deterioration which the intermixing of a single colony would produce.

HABITS OF THE BUFFALO.

One of the largest buffaloes ever known was shot by Mr. Hornaday. It is now preserved in the National Museum. It is five feet eight inches high at the shoulders, and in ten feet ten inches long from nose to tail. Many buffaloes weigh over sixteen hundred pounds. The natural life of the animal is about twenty-five years. The cows usually breed once a year, and begin breeding at the age of two years. The buffalo calf at birth is covered with red hair. This hair changes after a time to brown and then black. The hair on the head of a buffalo is very long. Many a woman, in fact, would be glad to have as long hair as that or one of the stuffed buffaloes in the National Museum, which measures, I am told, twenty two inches. The buffalo cows weigh less than the bulls, a good fat one weighing from a thousand to twelve hundred pounds. They have small udders, but their milk is very rich. It requires, in fact, the milk of two cows to satisfy one buffalo calf. The best time to look at a buffalo is in the fall or winter. In the summer he is as ragged, ugly and dirty as any animal on earth. He sheds his hair every year, beginning about February. The hair comes off a little at a time. It often hangs in patches in his black skin, and he will tight you if you touch it. He is troubled by the flies at this time, but he goes off to the nearest mudhole and rolls in it until he has plastered his body with mud. If the mole is not deep enough he will dig it out with his horns and hoofs, and then get in and roll over until his entire skin is coated. He carries such coats of mud throughout the summer, and about the first of October he comes out with a fall suit of beautiful black hair, which thickens as winter approaches, and which affords him sufficient protection from the cold.

WHAT A BUFFALO IS WORTH.

The value of buffaloes has been increasing more rapidly than anything in this country. Town lots in Chicago are nothing to them. About ten years ago they were a drug in the market. Thousands of them were killed for their tongues, but a good buffalo is now worth at least $100 when dead. Its skin is worth from $100 and upward, according to quality, and the head is worth from $500 to $600 for mounting and preservation as a relic of this great animal of the past. Such is the value of a dead buffalo. Live buffaloes for breeding are worth much more, and I am told that the government buffaloes are worth from $1,000 to $2,000 apiece. At this rate the fifty in the Yellowstone Park are worth from $50,000 to $100,000. They are worth $15,000 to the farmers who can assist in and $15 them in the wilds of the Yellowstone Park. Suppose there were fifty pairs deer in the Adirondack mountains, how long would it be before they would be killed by hunters, no matter what the laws might be? The Yellowstone Park is your whole so large as the Adirondacks, and is fifty times as far from civilization. The country about it contains people who care nothing for the buffalo or other game, except for the money which they can get out of them. When [illegible] that a half dozen such men could clean out this herd in one day, provided they could find it in one of the many wild valleys, and thereby make $250,000 out of the job, you get some idea of the danger which exists.

During the present week I have had chats with Mr. Langley, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Professor Goode, the head of the National Museum, Dr. Baker, the scientist in charge of the Zoological Park, and others, as to the matter. The Smithsonian Institution has no interest in the matter outside of a scientific one. It has, however, a great amount of information concerning the buffalo, much of which was collected by Mr. W. T. Hornaday. All of this information has been placed at my disposal, and through it I am able to give some of the details of one of the most disgraceful deeds of American history.

Few people are now aware of the history wonderful extent of the buffalo. No animal has ever existed in such large numbers nor covered so much territory. Buffaloes formerly roamed over the country as far east as Washington city, and there are records of herds of thousands being seen in Pennsylvania not long before the revolution. Six hundred years ago there were great droves to drink at the Blue Lick springs of Kentucky. Daniel Boone speaks of them and it is now only a few years since they ran into the Ohio and swam across it. They drove to pass a given point. Professor Hornaday says that at the lowest estimate there were 4,000,000 buffaloes in this one herd, and this, as I have said, was only twenty-five years ago. In 1868 a traveler along the Kansas Pacific railroad states that the train at one time passed through one hundred and twenty miles of solid buffalo. The plains were blackened with them and more than once the cars were stopped by them. The best authority at the National Museum as to the early buffalo is George Catlin, who spent the greater part of his life in the west studying the Indian, and who made many pictures of the buffalo as they existed before the great destruction began. He tells of herds of millions and says that their roaring resembled the thunder, and tells how the Indians killed them by the hundreds of thousands for the skins, for which they received only a pint of whisky apiece.

HOW THE BUFFALO WERE KILLED.

You would not think that such immense herds could be wiped out. The buffalo, however, are very dull beasts in many ways. They are a mixture of stupidity and intelligence which is hard to understand. These mighty herds were made up of companies, or clumps, of buffaloes of from twenty to one hundred each, each clump being led and taken care of by one strong bull. In going or water one of the old cows of the clump would start ahead and come along the track of a dry stream or a mudhole in a water hole, the others in that company following in single file. The herd would then drink and lie down to rest before eating. This would seem to mean a high degree of intelligence, but such evidence is not clear in their attempting to escape from man. A hunter might lie with a repeating rifle near such a herd and pick out one after the other without apparently frightening or scaring the rest. If they run it was mostly against the wind, and they were towards except when brought to bay. At first the cows brought but little and the temptation to kill was not so great. Still, thousands were killed for the purpose of killing them. The southern herd, which contained about four million, existed as late as 1872, in which time only about half a million buffaloes a year were killed from it. As soon as the railroads came in, hunters came by the score and, with breech-loading rifles, killed the animals by thousands. Captain Jack Bridger killed by contract 1,112 buffaloes at this point in six weeks. Buffalo Bill earned his title by the number of buffalo he killed in a short time, and Mr. Hornaday tells of one hunter who told him that he had killed sixty-three buffaloes in less than an hour. In some places the buffaloes were driven into pen-fences, breaking their necks by the hot and being skinned afterward.

KILLING BUFFALO BY HORSE POWER.

With some of these hunter murderers the ordinary process of skinning was not fast enough, and they invented a way of skinning the buffalo by means of horses. They would cut the skin at the neck and down the belly and around the legs at the knees. A stout iron bar, like a hitching post, was then driven through the shaft and firmly fastened into the earth. Then a rope was tied to the thick skin of the neck. The other end of the rope was hitched to the whiffle tree of a pair of horses, or to the rear axle of a wagon. The horses were whipped up, and the skin was torn from the back of the buffalo, with about fifty pounds of flesh sticking to it. This method, however, was not a success, and was soon given up. About fifty thousand buffaloes have been killed for their tongues, an account having been made for their cows. For a long time every skin sent to the eastern represented two buffaloes, the others having been uncovered. Thousands of buffaloes were killed by freight and moonlight, the hide in such cases being made to do duty for the carcass. During the year 1873 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad alone carried a quarter of a million buffalo robes, and more than a million and a half pounds of buffalo meat, and during the three years following 1873 more than three million buffaloes were slaughtered by the white men, and of these 1,500,000 were wasted. The great southern herd had been annihilated by 1883. At the time the market had been overstocked with robes, and the hunters got 25 cents to $1.25 for them.

There was then left only the great herd of the northern part of the United States. In Montana began in 1884, as which time about 20,000 buffaloes were shipped out of the country every year. The bones of the northwestern territory numbered about 75,000 buffaloes a year. At one time the railroad cars into the country the hunters came in, and to take them were loaded hunters and skinners at work. They killed the buffaloes by the thousands for their robes, getting from $1 to $2 to $3 apiece for them, and within about four years this vast herd was wiped out. In 1889 it was estimated that there were a half million buffaloes within a radius of 250 miles of Miles City. In 1894 the last carload of buffalo robes ever shipped to the east was sent over the railroad.

MONEY IN BUFFALO.

The hunting of the buffaloes was immensely profitable. According to the figures of Mr. Hornaday, hundreds of thousands of dollars were made out of the slaughter long before 1890. From 1870 to 1883 there were four expeditions, which killed buffaloes, worth more than a million dollars, and the buffaloes killed up to that time within twenty years produced a sum of more than $25,000,000. There are records of single firms who handled hundreds of thousands of buffalo robes. Alfred Sully of New York and St. Paul in 1872 bought 40,000 pounds worth of buffalo robes, in 1874 an equal amount, and about $100,000 worth of buffalo hides. The firm in which he was for years paid more than $200,000 for buffalo robes and hides, and, in connection with one other firm, they sold enough robes to bring in almost $1,000,000. There were a number of other traders who made money out of the business, to say nothing of those who got rich off buffalo meat and buffalo bones. In a trip which I took over the Canadian Pacific road a few years ago, I saw mountains of buffalo bones at many of the stations. The railroads shipped them, and by the million of pounds, while the merchants sold for $12 per ton. The most of most of these buffaloes went to waste. It seldom brought more than two or three dollars a ton, and it was cheaper to value when dried or jerked. Jerked meat sometimes brought as high as ten cents per pound, the tongues being worth much more.

THE DESECRATION OF THE BUFFALO.

It is interesting to some to know that the buffalo can be domesticated. Had the government prohibited the killing of wild buffaloes years ago and provided in some way that they might be conserved and yet be domestic uses, the United States would today be business of millions of dollars richer and there would be a new breed of cattle used by man. The male buffalo breeds readily with the opposite sex of domestic cattle, and it is shown that the half-breeds are much hardier than the ordinary stock, much larger and that they produce good meat and milk. Buffaloes have been used as oxen. They are easily tamed and they could have been of great service in logging camps and for the hauling of heavy burdens. They do not need much to eat, subsisting on the same things as other cattle and being much hardier and more active than the ordinary ox. Half-breed buffaloes can stand the cold of the open prairie during our severest winters where the thermometer is seen thirty to forty degrees below zero. They are very prolific, the cows having calves every year. Such animals are almost as large as the buffalo, being covered with the same woolly hair, though the hair is not so long nor so thick. When it is remembered today that a buffalo hide is worth at least $100, and that it can be seen that the having of a herd of buffaloes, of which the increase would be regularly estimate, would be of no small value to the owner.

The bringing of the buffaloes to Washington will be a very good investment for the government. As they stand they are worth a thousand dollars apiece, and there is no doubt but that the cost of the herd will bring this amount from the Zoological Gardens of this and other countries. The buffaloes which are already here have shown that they increase and that the climate at Washington is perfectly adapted to them. They are thriving and with the addition of those in the Yellowstone it is believed that the herd can be perpetuated. Both action as Congress takes upon the matter, however, should be done at once, as a single party of vandal hunters may wipe out the herd at almost any moment.

Francis G. Carpenter

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