

A WINTER'S SPORT IN THE ROCKIES.

By W. A. BAILLIE-GROHMAN, AUTHOR OF "CAMPS IN THE ROCKIES."

THOSE who hunted in the Rocky Mountains occupying Western Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, fifteen years ago, still saw a vast tract of mountain country much in the same condition in which it was in the days of Fremont or of Lewis and Clark, when white men were interlopers and the red man was lord of the land. Only one trans-Continental railway then spanned the trans-Missourian west, and north and south of that single line of rails lay countries incomparable for the quantity as well as for the variety of mountain big game. It is true it took weeks of horseback travel to reach these desirable localities and a certain amount of roughing had to be undergone, but travel of this kind had charms which far outweighed the inconveniences and hardships. To-day there is no west left, the last Indian skirmish has been fought, the last bison has been killed, and while there are a few bighorn and wapiti still left, it is difficult to find any tract of country, except the most elevated regions on or above timber-line, where the prospecting miner, the ranchman, or the railway surveyor has not left his mark, or where one could ride, say two days on end, without striking some human habitation. Dozens of railroads have pushed an uncouth civilisation into nooks and corners, which but a year or two ago one felt assured would retain their primeval solitude for many decades. Where less than twenty years ago literally millions of bison were still dotting the great undulating plains of Montana, where the giant of his race, the lordly wapiti, was to be seen in herds of many hundreds, there to-day the bleached bones of the former and the shed antlers of the latter are collected by men wandering over the country with their carts, the bones to be sold to the manufacturers of manure, the antlers to be fashioned into trophies which find a ready sale in the Eastern states. It is known from official figures that in two

years in the seventies 3,000,147 bison were slaughtered in Kansas and Nebraska for their hides.

One of the many men who assisted in this slaughter—they were called skin-hunters—and who was paid two shillings per head of the thousands his rifle brought down, has now, scarcely twenty years later, the only remaining herd of semi-domestic bison—not counting those who have found a last refuge under the protection of Government troops in the Yellowstone Park—on his farm in Nebraska, and receives from £60 to £200 from zoological gardens and showmen for each live specimen!

But rather than bewail the comparatively gameless present let me invite the reader to enjoy the past and to accompany the two trappers—bearded and long-haired individuals, clad in shaggy buffalo-coats, and the similarly adorned "Kid," a singularly precocious western youth, of unprecedented swearing capacities, but withal a capital "camp rustler"—and the writer, on an autumn and winter fur-hunting and big-game shooting expedition into the heart of the rugged Big Wind River Divide, from which elevated backbone of the continent the waters flow to the Atlantic and to the Pacific.

All are old and tried friends, for man and horse have been together on several trips before, and travel of this kind makes one as intimately familiar with the human nature of one's companions as it does with the equine nature of the animal which, nowhere more so than in the West, is man's best friend.

We had left Rawlins, a little railway settlement on the U.P. (Union Pacific), where we had outfitted in July, and had struck out straight for the Gros Ventre country at the head of the Green River, some 300 miles to the north-westward, taking in the noted Rattlesnake hunting country on our way, so that the only settlement we passed was the then

important military post, Fort Washakie, on the Wind river. We had had three months' splendid sport and fair trapping, and were now making a week's camp, on the shores of a nameless little mountain lake about 100 miles west of the fort, to allow two of the men to ride to the latter for a fresh stock of provisions, and to get my mail which had accumulated there for the last three or four months, ere starting out again for a winter's hunt.

Our goal on this trip was to be a country which none of us knew, namely the eastern flank of that tangle of mountains, the Sierra Soshoné. We had explored this great range from the south, and I had penetrated on foot almost across the centre of it, where it was quite impassable for horseback travel, deep cañons cutting up the whole area of mountains into curiously isolated fortress-like blocks, many of which only skilful climbers could scale. In fact it had the reputation of forming an impassable barrier between the Big Wind River and the Yellowstone Park, less than 100 miles to the north of it. Famous old Bridger, when asked to guide some troops across this range, declaring that only birds could get across, and "they would have to pack their grub along." This latter reflection upon the supposed barrenness of this range did it, however, some little injustice, for the bottom of the gorges and cañons were, as I found, delightfully green with a luxurious sub-alpine vegetation, contrasting strangely with the sterility of the tableland and peaks forming these wonderfully secluded glens.

From Indians we had met in small hunting parties in the course of the summer's hunt we had heard enticing reports about the eastern flanks of the Sierra Soshoné; the creeks, they said, were still well stocked with beaver, and it was a noted wintering place of wapiti; while bighorn and bear were there as plentiful, they said, as they had ever been, few white men having hunted or trapped there.

However earnestly the "tenderfoot"—newcomer—must be warned against accepting or even asking the advice of the ordinary western man as to the best locality for sport, the same cannot be said of the Indian. The trouble with him is generally to get him to talk or to induce him to divulge such locality, and considering the truly shameful manner in which the white people have slaughtered the

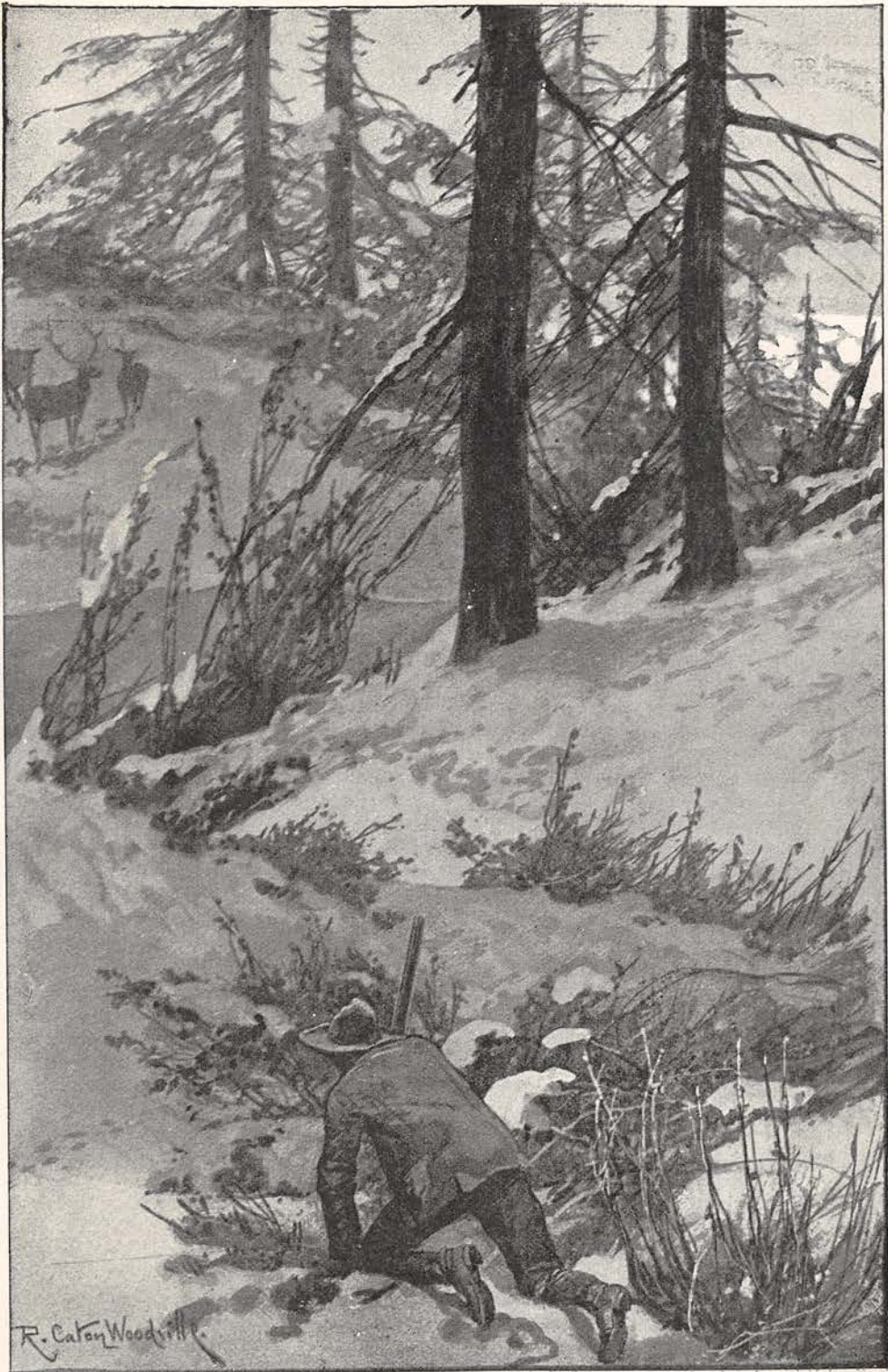
game upon which the Indian entirely subsisted one cannot feel surprise at this reticence.

In the days I am speaking about, an invasion of "Indian country" such as was the one we were in, by such a small party, had about it a zest-giving spice of risk. Only the year before while travelling in much the same manner through country even less remote from civilisation, the Indians inhabiting it had suddenly gone on the war-path without our knowing anything about it till it was almost too late, and we were compelled to "git out," with a band of Utes hovering round us for several days, whose bullets on one occasion came much too close to be comfortable, while one of them ended the career of a personal friend who had hunted with me but a week or two before.

The country we were now in was claimed by the peaceful Soshonés whose fine old chief, the celebrated "Washakie"—the white man's friend, he loved to call himself—was always exerting his influence to keep his more turbulent young bucks from joining any of the warlike demonstrations of other tribes. But the Government had recently allowed a much less ruly tribe—*i.e.* the Arrappahoes, under a noted fighting chief "Black Coal," to share the Soshonés' hunting grounds, and trouble between the new comers and their old enemies the Utes, who again were allies of the Soshonés, might break out at any moment. The fact that the hunting grounds of the powerful "Crow" tribe adjoined immediately to the north only complicated the situation.

"Grub Camp," as we called the place where we waited for a week while the men rode to the fort, was delightfully situated. Just below timber-line, at an altitude of some 8,000 feet, we had plenty of game all round us; the autumn weather, though it froze hard every night, was perfection itself. There was the best of bunch-grass to put new life into the horses after their somewhat arduous summer's work, and there was of course a plentiful supply of firewood, which, with the clear contents of the lake, supplied us with the four chief requirements of a good camp: game, grass, wood, and water.

There is a business-like air about the camp which shows that some of its inmates have lived from early youth in the wilderness, and have long learnt all the tricks of the backwoods to make themselves as comfortable and cosy as circumstances will permit. In such a camp it suffices to cast a glance at the manner the tent—if



AN EASY STALK REWARDED BY A GOOD HEAD.

indeed there be one at all in fine weather—is stretched; a look at the way the rifles are secured on stout pegs driven into a handy tree, and at the manner in which the fire is made up so that the wind does not drive the smoke in the direction of the tent, to show that it is not a “tenderfoot’s” camp.

Everything is in its place: the steel beaver traps with their stake-chains are neatly hung up on a convenient branch; the raw-hide pack-panniers, of material as stout as sole leather, wherein are placed one’s worldly goods while *en route*, are stacked up in a heap with a sail-cloth cover over them; the saddles, all of the heavy “Mexican” type, each with the bridle belonging to it looped over the horn, and the wooden pack-saddles, their cinche and lash-ropes neatly hung over the cross-trees, are piled up and similarly protected by a canvas cover. For no snug packing can be done if the ropes get wet. In several big “nicks” cut in the camp tree repose bits of soap, and on a peg hangs what is politely called the “dish-cloth,” which is, or rather once was, an old flour-sack. The two axes and my “antler saw”—really an ordinary butcher’s saw—recline against the same tree, and from the new coil of half-inch rope, which the men have brought with the provisions from the fort, the Kid is just cutting new lengths of lash-ropes to replace some worn-out ones.

A square piece of moose skin, dry and stiff as a board, nailed to the top of four upright posts under the spreading boughs of the camp tree, makes a capital table, upon which now lies, in a big heap, the accumulated mail brought back by the men from the fort. The big iron camp bucket, into which fit all the culinary utensils required for the somewhat primitive cooking of the party, makes, when turned upside down—or, as the Kid will persist in saying, “downside-up”—a comfortable seat when any writing has to be done at the table. The four “beds,” each consisting of two buffalo robes and a thick Californian blanket, are neatly rolled up in their strip of canvas, which protects them when, tightly corded, they are slung as side-packs on to the horses. Of luck one can speak if these same blankets have not to take the place of those worn out under the saddles or those that are lost, for it is one of the most puzzling things how blankets used as saddle-cloths for the pack-animals, will manage to wriggle out and get lost in a long “drive” over

country where steep ascents and descents cause the packs to shift if the saddle-girths are not constantly tightened. And a blanket thus lost is not only irreplaceable, but it generally means a sore back and a horse rendered unfit for work for a week or two, often just at a time when the carrying power of every animal is taxed to the utmost.

Every article of this camp is, as we have seen, in its place, for due observance of the old axiom that it is just as easy to put everything in its proper place at the start, rather than just drop it anywhere, saves in the end both time, trouble, and temper. The dilemmas caused by untidiness in this respect are often most vexatious, and never more so than if during the night a snowstorm covers the ground unexpectedly with a foot or two of snow, as I have seen it do on many occasions. Where are you next morning? In the tidiest of camps it is not an agreeable fix to be in, but in an untidy one it means—well, to put it mildly—some lively recrimination, hard language, and the loss of half a day or more in digging up the hundred and one camp belongings scattered in a wide circle all over the place, while another half day will have to be spent in drying the ropes and blankets and saddles before the fire ere they can be used. What wonder, therefore, that all old hands are punctiliously tidy, and that blindfolded they can lay their hands on the canister containing the stock of precious matches or on the whetstone whereon to sharpen their skinning knives, or on any other small “camp icta” you can mention.

The afternoon passes quickly to me with a first “skim” of my correspondence, while the men are settling the packs and preparing for an early start on the morrow. Leaving such a comfortable camp is like departing from home. You have had time to place a layer of soft pine boughs under your bed, the angularities of mother earth not being usually thus softened. You have discovered a delightful stretch of sandy beach on the lake for your matutinal dip. By means of a few logs tied together by odds and ends of rope you have fashioned a raft on which you have pushed out into the middle of the tarn where, with an improvised rod—the real article having long ago come to utter grief under the hoof of one of the horses—you have landed some splendid trout, and the experience of the odd hours thus devoted to the gentle



PACKING WAPITI HEADS BACK TO CAMP.

sport has taught you what flies or what vulgar bait these particular trout like best, and at what hour they are most apt to favour you with a rise these autumn days. The surrounding hills have been scoured, and yonder as yet unnamed peak, which the aneroid tells you is something over 13,000 feet in altitude, has been climbed in a long day on the rocks. The topographical details seen from this outlook have been added to the material already collected, which will assist in compiling a new map, which, bad as it may be, will yet be an improvement upon the only existing one, based as the latter appears to be on guesswork, and bad guesses at that.

But regrets at leaving the old camp are idle; winter is at hand and may be upon us now any day, and it is important that we should reach the new ground and pick out a good camp before snow comes to stay. So the following morning a start is made, though, as is almost always the case in a move of this kind, we do not get off as early as was intended. Those of the horses which were not taken to the fort are "playing mean," and object in sundry ways to be packed and to leave such a good camp and such abundant bunch-grass. The new packs, containing the stock of flour, sugar, and the side of bacon obtained at the fort, have to be divided among the lot of horses, or rather among the number of pack-horses, for there are a couple of spare mares as well as two colts which were born on the trip in the outfit. Each horse has of course its own particular pack-saddle, fitted as best simple tools can manage, to its back. Some have only one cinche or girth, others have two, which latter, if the animal will stand the double pressure, is always better, for it insures steady "riding" for the load in a mountainous country. Not a few horses, however, raise such persistent objections to the double girth as to endanger the load, however securely it is lashed to their back.

The pack-horses must be packed last, for otherwise they will roll and try other little dodges to rid themselves of their loads while the riding horses are being saddled. At last everything is ready, the men swing themselves into the saddle, the dogs jump about barking, and with a loud whoop from the rear man, the cavalcade sets itself into motion. For an hour or two the pack-horses will keep in file without much urging, but as soon as they get hungry there will be more

trouble to prevent them from straying.

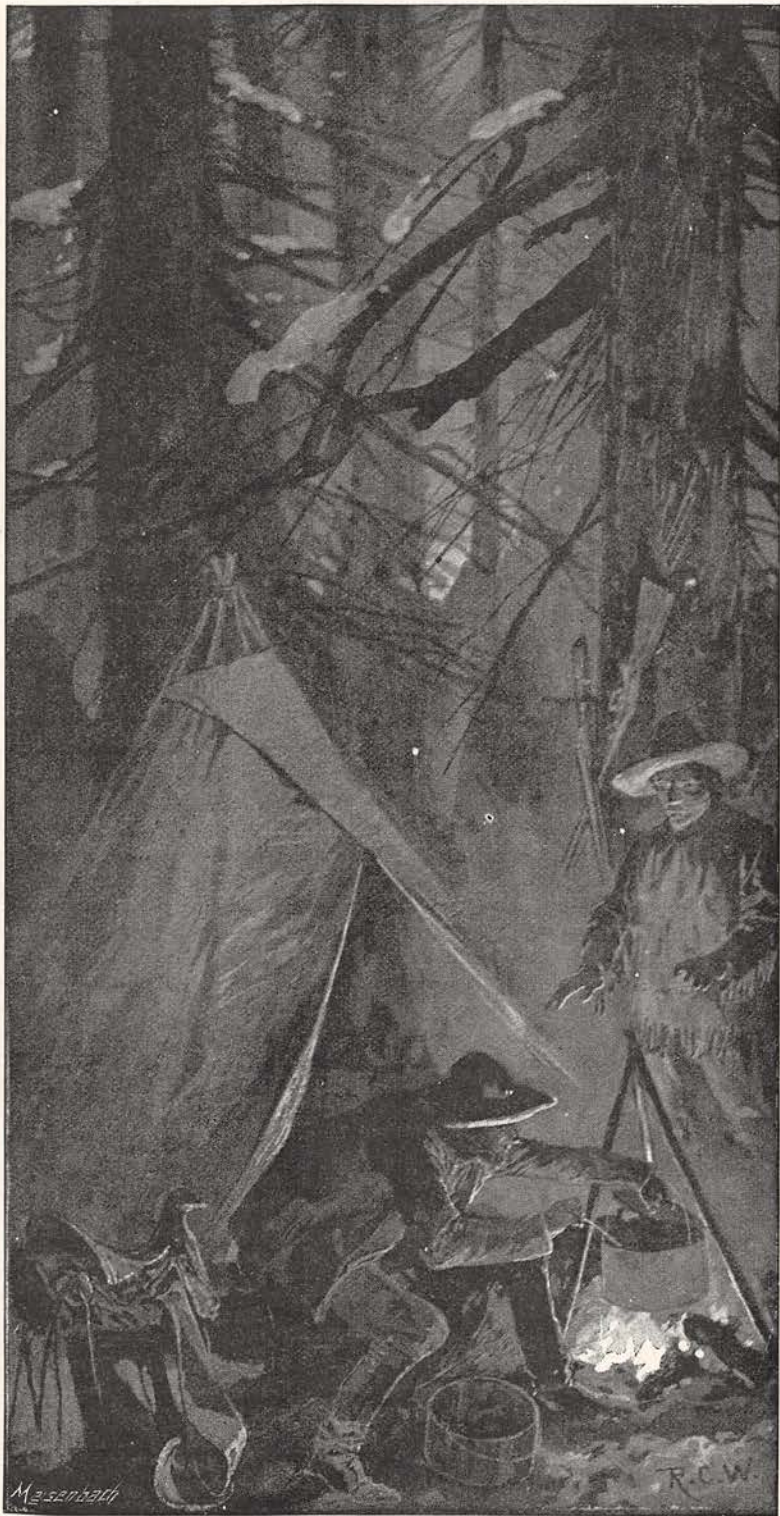
As the direction of our day's ride is plainly indicated by the ever visible landmark presented by "Washakie's Needle"—a fine peak which occupies the south-eastern corner of the sierra round which we have to make our way—I ride ahead. Boreas, my old hunting horse, after his week's rest and the bounteous bunch-grass, is "feeling good," and kicks up his heels as a preliminary exercise to the canter which he knows well enough is before him.

It is the latter half of October and the days are getting short, so no nooncamp will be made and the pack-train will keep on across the foothills until the base of the aforesaid peak is reached, where I shall have picked out a camping place by the time the slower moving pack-horses can get there, a bit of lunch in the cantinas of my saddle making me quite independent of the party for the rest of the day.

Game is almost constantly in view. On the bare ridges, often of quite rugged formation, which form the undulations which we have to traverse at right angles, mule deer in little bands can be seen grazing, but no specially good head is among the different lots, so they are not molested, and a few graceful leaps soon put the ridge between the deer and the hunter. A couple of old bison bulls I come upon in a secluded dell lumber away with that awkward gait so peculiar to them. Their hides are scabby and not even worth the cartridges it would take to obtain them. As I pass through a thicket of quaking aspens which cover the bottom of one of the gullies, half a dozen white-tail deer jump up and, with a whisk of their long-haired tails, disappear in the brush. Their grotesque "stiffkneed" bounds, unlike those of any other deer, as well as the fact that they are rarely seen outside of dense cover, make them difficult shooting. By and by I have to cross soft ground, where a big spring has made the ground for many acres round it sodden and swampy. Here apparently a big band of wapiti must have passed not many hours before, for the ground is one mass of tracks; the biggest herd of sheep one ever saw could not have made more. They were going in the same direction we are travelling, and they bear out what the Indians had told us, namely that all the wapiti in the higher range we have been hunting in leave it at the

approach of winter and collect in the sheltered breaks and gullies whither we are heading.

As meat is wanted for the pot a young mule-deer buck is shot shortly before we get into camp, and by the time the horses are unpacked and have had their roll in the grass, and the fire is lighted, I have the two hind-quarters hanging in camp. There is nothing left of one of them by the time we four and the two dogs have appeased our appetites. As we are to move on early in the morning, and the weather is fine, the tent is not stretched, and the evening is passed in the usual pleasant manner, lounging round the camp-fire, each individual busy with something or other. Garments need the proverbial stitch in time, moccasins want new raw-hide soles, saddles require a wire stitch or other repairs, lash or cinche ropes need splicing, hobbles lack new rings to replace worn-out ones, or the "fireirons"—the heavy but



COOKING THE EVENING MEAL.

sure Sharp, the Winchester repeater, and the '500 Express rifle—want the tender

care which the mountain man is wont to bestow on his old favourite. Is his arm not as precious to the burley trapper as the babe is to its mother? His life may any day depend upon the care which he has given it, and an irreparable accident to it is of more serious consequences than if he had broken his own bones.

But space will not permit one to dwell longer on the details of camp-life, for otherwise one could not describe, however briefly, the events to which one has hitherto been leading up, namely the winter sport which fell to our share after reaching our goal, and taking up our quarters in a cave-like "dug-out," which proved the best possible shelter in the extremely severe weather which set in later on in November.

In the days I am speaking of there was, as the reader will probably have gleaned for himself, no difficulty whatever about finding and shooting game, but rather to remember constantly the duty one owed to prolific nature of not killing more than one could make use of, and of thus wasting life merely for the sake of gratifying that deplorable lust of killing.

My chief aim in visiting the Rockies so repeatedly was to bag big heads; to get a dozen wapiti antlers over sixty inches in length, or a like number of bighorn with a circumference of seventeen and eighteen inches meant the securing of prizes which only few sportsmen who have visited the Rockies have been able to obtain. And while I will not deny that, notwithstanding great care and discrimination in the selection of one's quarry, one now and again killed animals which, when they lay dead on the ground before one, turned out to be smaller than one thought, and whose trophies therefore would not warrant transportation; these were occurrences which one tried to avoid as much as possible. Transporting these big heads was the chief difficulty in my case, as only a few horses were available for that duty. Transporting wapiti antlers on pack-horses, often for weeks at a time, is a most troublesome job, not only because one cannot get more than two big heads on one horse, but on account of their bulk, which makes travel through timbered mountain country most difficult if not entirely impossible. It is not always the easiest sacrifice after a long stalk, or a weary day's scramble on the rocky ledges which are the home of the bighorn, to stay the hand which is instinctively clutching the rifle, and curb that keen desire to make the proud quarry one's

own. The head the animal bears is, as the glasses tell one, a good one, but not a "best" one, and as there is more than enough venison in camp already, the beast must not be killed. Under these circumstances it was therefore a pleasant surprise to discover that the large hunting party of Soshonés, which we found one morning camped close to us, and amongst whom there were several bucks we had met before, were, after a few days' hunting and wasteful expenditure of cartridges, short of ammunition.

The fact was, as I learnt later on, they had given the greater part of their stock of this highly-prized article to their old allies the Ute Indians, who were out on the war-path, and as no fresh supply could be obtained at the fort, most of the party were deprived of the means wherewith to obtain their winter supply of meat, which, of course, is the primary object of the great fall hunt.

This circumstance opened to me a most desirable chance of shooting all the game I desired to kill without wasting more than a few carcasses of sheep which tumbled down places where they could not be easily got at, for the Indians were glad to make use of all the meat I could procure for them. Had I desired, and had my ammunition held out, I could have killed many hundred head, for I have never, either before or since, seen so much game as on that occasion. The bighorn, whose rutting season falls in November, had come down from the high ground which the old rams seek during the hot weather, and were now with the does and small fry. These animals, though not quite rivalling the chamois in agility, are bold rock climbers; and there is a sturdy pride and consciousness of strength about the pose of an old ram as he stands on some crag overlooking his realm, which is most attractive to the man fond of mountain sport. They take a good deal of killing too, and fine shooting is often necessary, not only on account of the deceptive nature of distances in the dry and clear atmosphere of the Rockies, but also on account of their vitality. Some of my big rams must have weighed quite 350lbs. and the largest horns (nineteen inch ones) weighed just under 40lbs., approaching for size the giant of that species, the argali of the Himalayas.

With wapiti I was also very lucky, for of course there were literally thousands upon thousands from which to pick and choose. The head which was generally pronounced the finest at the Trophy

Show of the American Exhibition held in London in 1887, where the pick of the European collections were shown, was killed by me on that occasion, while some others of a size one nowadays never sees were presented by me to friends and form part of well-known European collections. Had I had more ample means of transporting these bulky trophies, and had not such unprecedentedly severe weather set in, the like of which I never approachingly experienced in all the winters I have spent in different parts of the west, some of them in regions a good deal further north, I could have delighted many more sportsmen's hearts with trophies such as are now unobtainable, and made my own collection a more ample one. But of course in those days one had no idea that the extermination of big game would take place with such appalling rapidity. The two years following the expedition I have attempted to describe were particularly fatal to the game of this region and of the whole of Montana, for thousands of navvies temporarily employed in the construction of the Northern Pacific Railway turned skin-hunters and market-hunters; and the equally unfortunate fact that wapiti skins, which up to then had little or no value, suddenly came into demand in the eastern markets, caused men to slaughter these noble deer in the same unconscionable manner in which bison were massacred. Tens of thousands were butchered for the sake of a few shillings obtained for the skin. The end to our good time came with a heavy fall of snow

and the commencement of the cold spell to which reference has already been made. Shooting became practically impossible and for days raging blizzards prevented one leaving the "dug-out" at all. When our stock of flour, tea, and sugar began to wane, we thought it about time to make a break for the fort. It was decidedly the unpleasantest journey I have ever taken. What the extremest cold was I had no opportunity to ascertain, for the quicksilver in my thermometer congealed; but at the fort spirit instruments marked, we were told, 52° below zero, or 84° of frost, during the week we were on the journey down from the Sierra Soshoné. For a couple of days we were travelling over a bare, steppe-like tableland, which looked on those December days, without exception, the most dreary spot man ever put eyes on. The wind there was so fierce that it was impossible to put up the tent or find any other shelter. From Fort Washakie there were still 155 miles to Green River City (the nearest railway station), and two passes, one of 10,000 feet above the sea, had to be crossed. And yet would one not willingly undergo the same passing hardships were sport, such as then rewarded one's efforts, still obtainable? But railways, ranchmen, and miners have taken possession of what was once the sportsman's paradise. Many parts of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho are still worth visiting for the sake of sport, but the old glory of those States is gone never to return.