



CHASE OF THE BISON.

THAT most redoubtable sportsman, Parker Gillmore, in his "Encounters with Wild Beasts," gives some vivid and interesting accounts of the chase of the African buffalo, and his brother, the American bison. The following narrates his experiences in Northern Mexico:—

"The morning has broken clear and invigorating, breakfast has already been discussed, and the horses have got a rough rub over. The neighbourhood is well suited for a gallop, for from the slight shower of the previous evening the soil is springy, and fewer of the indefatigable little burrowers, the prairie dogs, have undermined the vicinity. Meat is wanted, and as we start our minds are made up that, unless successful, the sun must dip the western horizon ere we return. Attending our own nags, and giving an extra pull upon the girths ere getting into the saddle, at a sober steady pace we start. An old practised buffalo runner (for so a Western man terms his favourite and experienced horse) will quietly settle to his master's will, for from experience well he knows that probably a hard day's work is before him, and all his strength will be required; whilst the youngster or griffin at this work frets and prances, almost pulling his rider from the pigskin. Forbear rider, curb your annoyance, give and take a pull upon your snaffle, soon the novice will settle down, and this day's work will probably teach him a lesson that will act advantageously on his future conduct.

Discussing subjects suitable for such occasions, miles are passed; so far, with the exception of numerous bleached bones, or an occasional deer or antelope

track, no indication of our quarry has been seen. From a knoll a survey is made, a fresh hole or two is taken up in the girths, and the scarcity of game commented upon. To the Indian, of course, the blame is laid; war parties or moving villages of redskins are always saddled with being the cause of every disappointment and annoyance in wild life. But look there! What is that? A distant cloud of dust. Buffalo for a thousand, and advancing towards where the hunters are stationed. How is the wind? is inquired. One wets his finger with his saliva and holds it up.

In a few moments the position is declared untenable, and vaulting on their horses all hurry off to get more to leeward, availing themselves of a swell in the prairie to keep *perdu*. Having marked well the direction in which the herd is advancing, keeping as much out of sight as possible, scarcely speaking a word, and then not louder than a whisper, the distance between the hunters and their prey is rapidly diminished. From the nature of the ground no longer can sportsmen remain hid, so, taking their horses well in hand, forward they dash, and, in a few strides, what a sight is before them! Cows, bulls, and calves, all intermingled, forming a straggling drove of thousands, heading in the same direction, and feeding as they progress. Occasionally this harmony of action is disturbed. Two ragged clumsy-looking veteran bulls approach each other—perhaps they have been former rivals for some dusky-hided beauty's favours. With a deep bellow one throws down the gauntlet, which the other is not loth to take up; and, with fire flashing from their partially-hid eyes, each rushes at the other. But the herd have become alarmed; a foe equally dreaded by both

bulls is at hand: their *rencontre* will brook delay to be settled at a future date; and, with a startled stare and toss of the head, both turn and rush off after the herd, which is already making a most hurried stampede. However, when the hunters are old hands, the bulls might have saved themselves the trouble: while young cow beef is to be obtained, none but the veriest novice would think of wasting ammunition on their tough and rugged old carcasses.

No time is now to be lost. These animals, unwieldy as they appear, for a mile or so are wonderfully swift, and if they should gain rough ground will beat an indifferent horse. Sitting well down in their saddles, nags in hand, and gun resting across the tree, at a grass country pace, all push for the sleekest and squarest-looking cows they can mark. The pace commences to tell, the distance that separates sportsman from quarry is rapidly diminishing, a few strides more and one ranges alongside. The gun, which has been just taken in the right hand, has its barrel depressed, low down, and eight or ten inches behind the shoulder is the spot to aim at if shooting forward.

A puff of smoke is seen, followed by a report. The *coup de grace* has been administered by a master-hand, for the huge animal loses the power of its forefeet, comes down on its shoulders and head, and nought of life is left but a few spasmodic struggles. But where are the hunters? Look well among the retreating herd and you may occasionally catch a glimpse of their hunting shirts. A few moments more and another shot is fired, this time not so successfully. Again the gun speaks; still the quarry retains her legs, but blood is already pouring from her nose, an indication that surely tells of speedy demise; so stop, let the poor creature die in peace—aggravate not her last moments.

The scene which I have tried to describe took place about ten miles on the

south side of the Yellowstone. An old and tried friend from Germany was my companion, and on this occasion we each killed two cows. Double the number, or even more, could have been shot without trouble, but the requisite amount of beef had been obtained, and I was jealous of husbanding the strength of my horse, for then, as now, but little reliance could be placed on the professed peaceful intention of the Indians.

The bison has other enemies as well as man. The wolves seldom leave him alone. Day and night they bestow upon him the most devoted attention. However, as long as he is in good health he has little to fear from the marauder; but the moment that accident, sickness, or loss of strength from starvation occurs, the buffalo's unhappy position is known, and half-a-dozen of these robbers will remain by him night and day, watching for an opportunity to complete the wreck; and, should not this occur as soon as desirable, sometimes they will make a simultaneous assault, one pretending to fly at the victim's head, while another attacks in the rear, endeavouring to cut the hamstring, in which they invariably succeed unless the presence of man should disturb them.

On one occasion, while hunting, I obtained an excellent opportunity of witnessing one of these encounters. At a distance of half-a-mile I perceived an old bull going through a variety of eccentric movements, at the moment perfectly incomprehensible. To know what might be the cause, as well as, perhaps, to learn something new regarding this species, I left my horse and made a most careful stalk without once exposing myself, retaining the advantage of wind till within a hundred yards of the old gentleman. The ground in the vicinity was much broken, and before attempting to obtain a survey of the situation I ensconced myself behind a boulder. I had been eminently successful the first glance told me. There was the bull pretending

to feed, while four prairie wolves were lying around him on the sparsely-covered soil, tongues out, and evidently short of breath from some excessive exertion. None of the *dramatis personæ* had seen me, and I chuckled in my shoes as I grasped more firmly my double-barrel, knowing how soon I could turn the tide of battle.

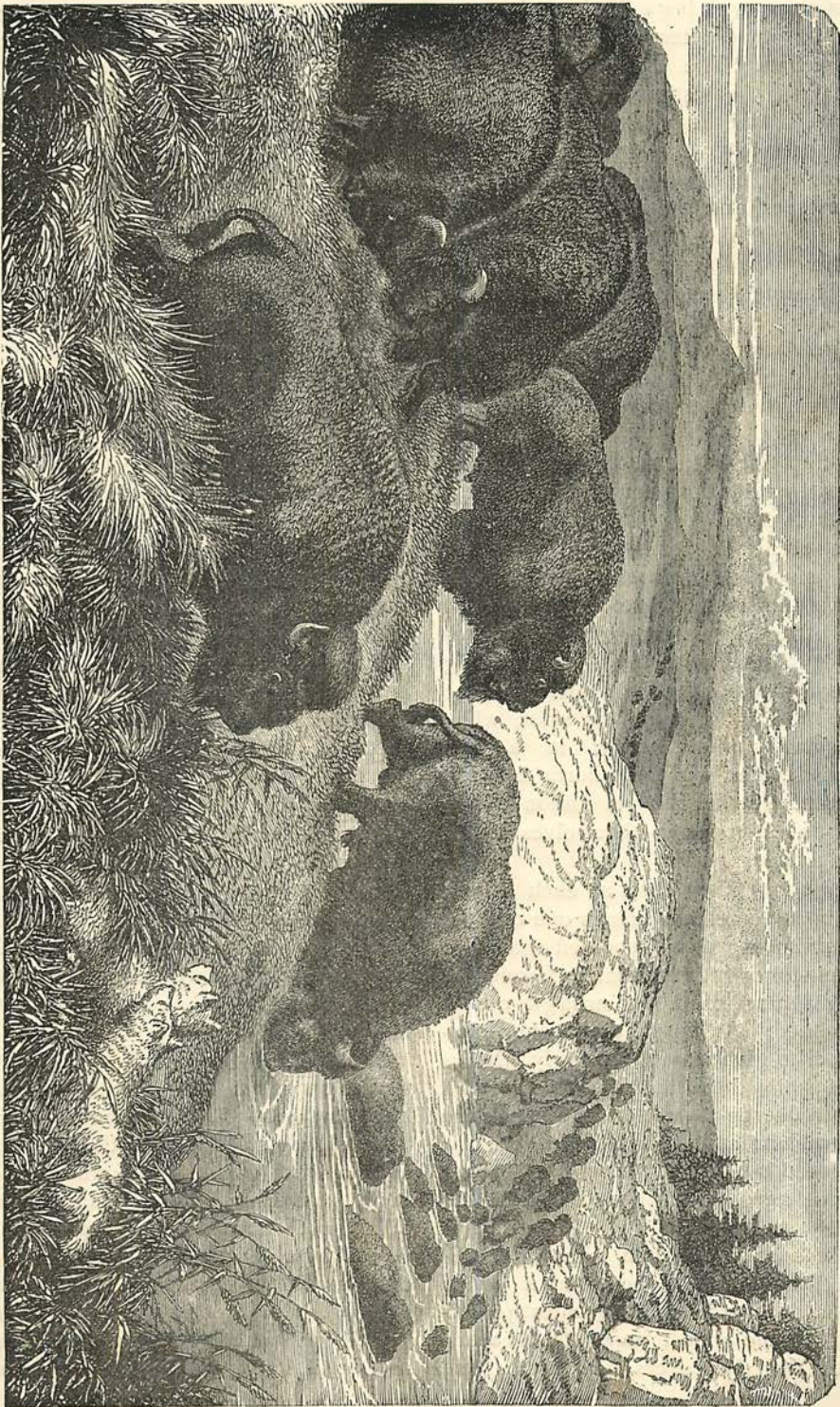
In a few minutes the apparent ring-leader of the quartette got up and shook himself. This was the signal for others to get upon their pins. Prairie wolf No. 1 walked quietly towards the bull, occasionally stopping (I believe after the manner of dogs to pluck grass), then, with a sudden spring, made a feint at the persecuted buffalo's head. The buffalo, in his turn, lowered his horns and rushed a few steps to meet him; but this was unnecessary. Now the rest of the fraternity rushed up. Another took the post of teaser, while our friend No. 1 dropped in the rear; and when a second feint at the head was made by his comrade, No. 1, watching his chance, left a deep scar over the bull's hock.

Again and again this game was played, the same wolf always retaining his rear position. Is not the instinct of animals most similar to the reason of man? Here each wolf had his allotted work—doubtless that which was best suited for his capacity. The rear assault was the most dangerous; for a kick well directed would unquestionably have caused instant death to the adventurous assailant; but the most experienced and expert had selected the post of danger and honour. The flashing eyes and foaming mouth of the bull told most plainly the result; so I stepped from my concealment. However, all were so occupied that until I awakened the echoes with a loud 'war-whoop,' I was unseen; but man's voice always has its effect in cases of this kind. The vermin, with startled stare, plainly asking what the deuce right I had to interfere, sulkily trotted off as I advanced; while the

persecuted, in return for my kindness, lowered his head and pushed rapidly for me, compelling me to seek safety in flight. Such conduct in the buffalo was scarcely commendable, and very unusual. I accounted for it by the harassing his temper had suffered, as well as his feeling how inadequate his strength was for escape by flight.

Poor old creature, his days were numbered; for as soon as my back was turned, and a safe distance intervened between us, the wolves returned, and as I rode homewards, occasionally turning and halting to watch the gradually more indistinct belligerents, the victim was still employed in battling for life. After all, was he not paying the debt of Nature and dying as his ancestors for generations had died before him? Man yields his spirit to the source from whence it emanates, on a luxurious couch or humble straw bed, after frequently suffering from protracted and painful illness. The veteran buffalo, effete from age after a long and happy life, when unable to keep with his companions, dies in a gallant and short struggle, overpowered by his too numerous enemies—a death worthy of a hero.

The cow produces her calf in spring, although I have on several occasions met with a mother as late as the end of July, with a youngster by her side not over a couple of weeks old. The attachment shown by the parent for her offspring, and the solicitude she evinces for its safety, impart a touching lesson, which even the human family would do well to follow. I remember on one occasion I had been setting traps in a small stream that had abundant signs that beaver were numerous in the vicinity. I had waded up this watercourse for upwards of a mile, all the time being hid from view of animals on the prairie by the bluntness of the banks. Having performed my task, I left the stream and ascended to the level of the country. The first glance I took disclosed a



WANDERING BISON CROSSING A RIVER.

beautiful and interesting picture, for a young cow, with her calf almost between her legs, stood determinedly facing several wolves. The baby was evidently sick, and the instinct of the party of prowlers told them so, but thus far the attached mother had kept them off. My sympathies, of course, were not with the aggressors, and the better to prove it I picked out the apparent ringleaders, doubling one up with the first barrel, and accelerating the retreat of another with a second; for, although he did not drop, an ominous 'thud' gave him a hint that the neighbourhood was dangerous, and that he had better leave it while he had the power.

In September the rutting season commences, and furious encounters between the bulls take place; their actions on these occasions remind the spectators very much of domestic cattle. The combatants at first stand apart, eyeing each other with flashing orbs, while they paw up the soil with their feet, throwing it frequently higher than their withers; their short tails lash their sides, while occasionally they bellow in a low guttural voice, dig their horns into the soil, and scatter the vegetation to the winds, as if to work themselves into a greater fury.

At length they rush at each other; the shock sometimes brings one or both to their knees; this is repeated again and again—for over thirty minutes frequently, when well matched, the struggle will be protracted. At length the weaker commences to give way, first slowly, always keeping his head to the foe, till with sudden energy he wheels and leaves the victor triumphant. All this time the cow has stood by, an inert spectator, waiting for the hero of the hour to claim her love.

These battles seldom or never terminate fatally. They occur at a period when the coat is in the greatest perfection, and the almost impenetrable mane which densely covers the brows and

fore-quarters is unquestionably of the greatest service as a protection. It is my belief that when the sexes thus mate, the male remains faithful to his spouse, for up to within a month of the cow's confinement, both keep together. Early in autumn the bulls are in good condition, but after the rutting season they gradually lose flesh, and by midwinter have become so poor that they are scarcely fit for food. The female, on the other hand, keeps in good condition, and even in spring fat may be found along the vertebræ and lower portion of the carcass an inch thick.

With the advent of the first mild weather, even before the snow has disappeared, they commence to shed their rough coat, first from between the fore legs, after from the prominent parts of the body, and later from the fore limbs and hump. This long hair—or, as it is frequently called, wool—comes off in patches, trees and rocks being used to rub against; the result is, that by March a more ragged, tattered, weather-beaten creature can scarcely be imagined. The horns of both bull and cow are about the same length; those of the former are thick, blunt, and clumsy, while the latter are sharp, slim, and trim-looking. Both sexes much resemble each other; at the same time the figure of the female is more delicately formed, and not within a couple of hands as high at the shoulder, nor is she clothed with such a quantity of the rough coarse covering over the fore quarters.

When a herd of buffalo are alarmed by the approach of the hunter the cows in a few seconds head the retreating herd, closely followed by the yearlings and calves, while the lumbering old bulls, from incapacity, drop in the rear. When not disturbed, in lying down or rising, they exactly resemble others of the *Bos* family; but if they be come upon unawares by an object of fear, the velocity with which they gain their legs, and break into a gallop, is truly surpris-

ing. They are excellent swimmers, and have no hesitation in entering water; nevertheless, annually, great numbers are drowned, but this generally occurs in spring, when the broken ice is clearing out of the streams. Throughout the western country there are numerous quagmires, and frequently unfortunates get imbedded; it appears, in such cases, that without exerting themselves they submit to their fate. I have formed this conclusion from having, unseen, perceived a bull get into such a scrape. I watched him; inch by inch he kept sinking; still I felt convinced that a protracted, energetic struggle would take him across to *terra firma*, yet no such

effort did he make. Thoroughly believing that he was prepared to resign his earthly career, I advanced to have a closer survey of the finale. The unfortunate did not see me till within a few yards; but when he did, his habitual fear of man predominated over all other feelings.

Again and again he plunged heavily forward; dread of my proximity had given him strength and resolution, for, after a few minutes, his feet got on soundings, from which the margin was gained, and the brute was once more free. I think this apathy to death, in certain forms, is common to the majority of the inferior animals."



LUCKY AUSTRALIANS.

ONE of two brothers, owning 80,000 acres of land in Victoria, at a dinner and ball given to 800 of his friends and neighbours, thus referred to his own career in returning thanks for his health having been

drunk by those assembled:—

"He could assure his guests that he had been no loafer, but a hard-working man, in his early career in the colony. When he first came to Victoria he had endured many hardships, and, in travelling with his sheep in search of a run, he slept out many a night with his saddle for a pillow, the wide-spreading branches of a gum-tree for his covering, and the canopy of heaven for his roof. When he left home to go to Australia, he promised his father and mother that he would be back to them again in five years, and he redeemed his promise so far, that he was back to them in the sixth year. He only stayed at home a short time, when he returned to Australia again, and coming to Victoria, which was then only a province of New South

Wales, he took up a run at a place then known as the Deep Creek, but now called Clunes. He afterwards took up some country at Mount William, the farthest limit settlement had then reached, and he was happy to inform them that the gentleman who was his overseer then was one of the guests that night, and was also his equal in social station. To be a pioneer in those times, was, he could assure them, no child's play; and now that fortune had smiled upon him, and that his economy and determination to succeed in life had been crowned with success far beyond his expectations then, he was thankful for his success, inasmuch as it gave him the means of assisting to promote the interests of the country that had done so much for him, and which he loved so dearly."

Successful men of this stamp are to be met with in the whole of the Australian colonies; and many of their biographies, if written, would exemplify the romance of real life in a very striking manner, and would be found to be full of dramatic incident. This has been more