

bound fillet-like around the head, and all in the scantiest clothing. Conspicuous among them were Dixon and Louison. To this latter I then, and thereafter, attached myself.

My horse was a good one, an American, but grass-fed and prairie-bred. Whether he had gained his experience among the whites or Indians I do not know, but he was a good hunter and knew about buffalo, and badger holes as well, and when he did get his foot into one it was not his fault.

Now I was to see the buffalo. This was an event on which my imagination had been dwelling. I was about to realize the tales the mere telling of which was enough to warm the taciturn Renville into enthusiastic expression, and to rouse all the hunter in the excitable Frenière.

The prairie over which we rode was rolling, and we were able to keep well to leeward and out of sight of the herd. Riding silently up a short slope, we came directly upon them. Not a hundred yards below us was the great, compact mass of animals, moving slowly along, feeding as they went, and making the loud incessant grunting noise peculiar to them. There they were.

The moment's pause that we made on the summit of the slope was enough to put the herd in motion. Instantly as we rose the hill, they saw us. There was a sudden halt, a confused wavering movement, and then a headlong rout; the hunters in their midst. How I got down that short hillside I never knew. From the moment I saw the herd I never saw the ground again until all was over. I remember, as the charge was made, seeing the bulls in the rear turn, then take a few bounds forward, and then, turning for a last look, join the headlong flight.

As they broke into the herd the hunters separated. For some instants I saw them as they showed through the clouds of dust, but I scarcely noticed them. I was finding out what it was to be a prairie hunter. We were only some few miles from the river, hardly clear of the breaks of the hills, and in places the ground still rough. But the only things visible to me in our flying course were the buffalo and the dust, and there was tumult in my breast as well as around me. I made repeated ineffectual attempts to steady myself for a shot at a cow after a hard struggle to get up with her, and each time barely escaped a fall. In such work a man must be able to forget his horse, but my horsemanship was not yet equal to such a proof. At the outset, when the hunters had searched over the herd and singled out each his fattest cow, and made his dash upon her, the herd broke into bands which spread over the plain. I clung to that where I found myself, unwilling to give up, until I found that neither horse nor man could bear the strain longer. Our furious speed had carried us far out over the prairies. Only some straggling groups were in sight, loping slowly off, seemingly conscious that the chase was over. I

dismounted and reloaded, and sat down on the grass for a while to give us both rest. I could nowhere see any of my companions, and, except that it lay somewhere to the south of where I was, I had no idea where to look for the camp. The sun was getting low, and I decided to ride directly west, thinking that I might reach the river hills above the fort while there was light enough for me to find our trail of the morning. In this way I could not miss the camp, but for the time being I was lost.

My horse was tired and I rode slowly. He was to be my companion and reliance in a long journey, and I would not press him. The sun went down, and there was no sign that the river was near. While it was still light an antelope came circling round me, but I would not fire at him. His appearance and strange conduct seemed uncanny but companionable, and the echo to my gun might not be a pleasant one. Long after dark I struck upon a great number of paths, deeply worn, and running along together in a broad roadway. They were leading directly toward the river, and I supposed, to the fort. With my anxieties all relieved I was walking contentedly along, when I suddenly recognized that these were buffalo-trails leading to some accustomed great watering-place. The discovery was something of a shock, but I gathered myself together and walked on. I had been for some time leading my horse. Toward midnight I reached the breaks of the river hills at a wooded ravine, and just then I saw a rocket shoot up into the sky, far away to the south. That was camp, but apparently some fifteen miles distant, impossible for me to reach by the rough way in the night around the ravines. So I led my horse to the brink of the ravine, and going down I found water, which, à *plusieurs reprises*, I brought up to him, using my straw hat for a bucket. Taking off his saddle and bridle, and fastening him by his long lariat to one of the stirrups, I made a pillow of the saddle and slept soundly until morning. He did not disturb me much, giving an occasional jerk to my pillow, just enough to let me see that all was right.

At the first streak of dawn I saddled up. I had laid my gun by my side in the direction where I had seen the rocket, and riding along that way, the morning was not far advanced when I saw three men riding toward me at speed. They did not slacken their pace until they came directly up against me, when the foremost touched me. It was Louison Frenière. A reward had been promised by Mr. Nicollet to the first who should touch me, and Louison won it. And this was the end of my first buffalo hunt.

The camp gathered around all glad to see me. To be lost on the prairie in an Indian country is a serious accident, involving many chances, and no one was disposed to treat it lightly. Our party was made up of men experienced in prairie and in mountain travel, exposed always to unforeseen incidents.



AMONG THE BUFFALO.

When Frenière left the camp in search of me he had no hesitation about where to look. In the rolling country over which the hunt lay it would have been merely an accident to find either camp or water. He knew I would not venture the chance, but would strike directly for the river; and so in leaving camp he kept the open ground along the heads of the ravines, confident that he would either find me or my trail. He was sure I would remain on the open ground at the first water I found. He knew, too, as I did not, that from the Fort the valley of the river trended to the northwest, by this increasing the distance I had to travel; still farther increased by a large bend in which the river sweeps off to the westward. On the maps in common use it was nearly north and south, and had it really been so in fact I should have reached the breaks while it was still light enough for me to see the Fort or recognize our crossing-place, and perhaps to find my way to the camp. All the same I had made an experience and it had ended well.

The camp equipage being carried in carts, and not packed upon mules, the gearing up was quickly done; but meanwhile I had time for a fine piece of fat buffalo-meat standing already roasted on a stick before the fire, and a tin cup of good coffee. My horse and I did a fair share of walking on this day's march, and at every unusually good spot of grass I took the bit from his mouth and let him have the chance to recruit from the night before.

We were now on the upland of the *Coteau du Missouri*, here 1,960 feet above the sea. Travelling to the northeastward our camp for the night was made by a fork of the Medicine Bow River, the last running water our line would cross until we should reach the waters of the *Rivière à Jacques* on the eastern slopes of the plateau. On the open plains water is found only in ponds; not always permanent, and not frequent.

From the top of the hill which gives its name to the stream where we had encamped the view was over great stretches of level prairie, fading into the distant horizon, and unbroken except by the many herds of buffalo which made on it dark spots that looked like groves of timber; here and there puffs of dust rising from where the bulls were rolling or fighting. On these high plains the buffalo feed contentedly, and good buffalo grass usually marks the range where they are found. The occasional ponds give them water, and, for them, the rivers are never far away.

This was the Fourth of July. I doubt if any boy in the country found more joy in his fireworks than I did in my midnight rocket with its silent message. Water and wood to-night were abundant, and with plenty in camp and buffalo all around we celebrated our independence of the outside world.



WALK ON THE PLAINS