

THE BUFFALO HARVEST

by Frank H. Mayer with Charles B. Roth

THE CROP WAS THERE WAITING

At the close of any war there are bound to be thousands of young men who find peacetime pursuits too dull for their adventure-stirred lives. Maybe that was truer after the Civil War than at any other time. I know how I felt. I was restive. I wanted out. Fortunately for us then we had what you don't have now: we had a frontier to conquer. It was a very good substitute for war.

And on this frontier, old mountain men who drifted in and kept brass rails and cuspidors of crude saloons in high polish, told us there were literally millions of buffalo. They didn't belong to anybody. If you could kill them, what they brought was yours. They were walking gold pieces, the old timers said, and a young fellow who had guts and gumption could make his fortune.

I have since learned that there never was a buffalo on the American continent. It didn't matter to me in 1872 that the animal I pursued was not a buffalo, but a bison. It was all one. He walked. He had a hide. The hide was worth money. I was young, 22. I could shoot. I liked to hunt. I needed adventure. Here was it. Wouldn't you have done the same thing if you had been in my place?

For the record, let me make the distinction between the buffalo and the bison clear, not that it matters too much but just for the record, you know. A bison is defined as "a large, shaggy-maned oxlike animal, having short hair and heavy strong front legs." A buffalo is an African stag or the tame water buffalo of India. I know it's splitting hairs to make an issue of this, but maybe it will keep some of the purists in their place if I admit I know the difference.

I didn't then. All I knew was that there were millions of wild animals loose on the plains and I needed money.

No one has ever decided just how many buffalo there were roaming the ranges, because no one could ever know. I have seen estimates that put it as many as 20,000,000. That may be too high. Later on I will quote you statistics of the number killed. All I or any of the other young buffalo hunters knew is that there were a lot of buffalo, and they were ours for the skinning.

Don't get the idea, though, that because there were so many buffalo hunting and killing them was easy. They were dumb brutes and wary and inclined to go off in wild stampedes if frightened. Almost anything could start a stampede. I have seen an old cow, placidly grazing, suddenly take it into her head that she was afraid of something. She would start to run. Immediately several thousand other buffalo would be running with her -- they didn't know why; they didn't know where.

Early hunters used to run the buffalo down on horseback, following the example of the Indian, who always hunted that way. It was fun. But it wasn't profitable. Then some unnamed genius discovered the professional way to harvest the buffalo. The first method was called the "running method," the professional way was styled the "stand method" -- and I think the nomenclature describes the two very well.

We professionals didn't run buffalo at all, but we called ourselves buffalo runners, never hunters. And we based our success on one little item of buffalo lore. We based it really on the overwhelming stupidity of the buffalo, unquestionably the stupidest game animal in the world. Nature provided the buffalo with almost no protective equipment. His eyesight was poor. His hearing was not much better. And his scent was faulty. He had the disposition, to quote Robert Louis Stevenson, in describing a dog he once owned, of "a tame sheep." He would not or could not fight, and all the pictures you see of a buffalo turning on the hunter are pure bunk. All he could do, as I told you a little while ago, was run.

Along with defenselessness the buffalo had a peculiar herd instinct that made it easy, for a man who knew how, to harvest him. Do you remember reading about buffalo herds millions strong, moving in a solid mass, and stopping trains and wagons? Of course the herd, this vast mass of animals, would be under the leadership of a grand old buffalo bull, who would trot

serenely at its head, issuing orders and demanding instant and complete obedience. Isn't that about the picture as you have it in your mind?

Get it out of there fast, because the fact is that no buffalo herd I ever saw numbered over two hundred animals, and most of them were very much smaller. Most of the herds would run from three to sixty animals, with an average of around fifteen.

In these small herds the buffalo traveled and fed, scattered over the plains, but each one separate and apart from the other herds. Whenever they stampeded they did come together and charged as one vast, solid herd. But when the fright passed they'd separate into their peculiar small herd formation.

Do keep these small herds in mind: they were important to us in our hunting; in fact formed the basis of our attack.

Let me tell you how. At the head of each of these little herds would be its leader. But the leader wasn't a courageous, old bull, ready and willing to whip the universe. It wasn't a bull at all. It was a cow, a sagacious old cow who by the power of her intellect had made herself a leader. Buffalo society, you see, was a matriarchy, and the cow was queen. Wherever she went, the others, including the big bulls who should have known better than follow a woman, went. When she stampeded, they stampeded. When she got into trouble, they didn't know what to do.

And our job as runners was to get her into trouble as soon as we could. Then the rest was easy. But I am getting ahead of myself and will presently tell you how we used the old cow and the small herds to their undoing.

The buffalo was indigenous to the plains region of the West, and there were two main herds, the northern and the southern. There wasn't a strict line of demarcation between them, and they frequently overlapped, but within broad general limits, the northern herd remained up north and the southern herd stuck pretty well to the southern areas.

If you will look at a map of the Western half of the United States, I can point out the buffalo ranges. They are covered today by the two Dakotas and Montana and northern Wyoming, where the northern herd ranged, and by Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, parts of Texas, Colorado, and southern Wyoming, for the southern herd.

The buffalo was a migratory animal with a small orbit. He merely followed the feed, "follered the feed," as the runners, who were not purists or English majors, used to put it, and you would find the herds usually along the beds of Western streams -- the Brazos, Red, Powder, Republican, and other rivers.

Buffalo running as a business got started around 1870; I got into it in 1872, when the rampage was at its height. The whole Western country went buffalo-wild. It was like a gold rush or a uranium rush. Men left jobs, businesses, wives and children, and future prospects to get into buffalo running. They sold whatever they had and put the money into outfits, wagons, camp equipment, rifles and ammunition. I needn't talk. I did it myself. And why not? There were uncounted millions of the beasts -- hundreds of millions, we forced ourselves to believe. Their hides were worth \$2 to \$3 each, which was a lot of money in 1872. And all we had to do was take these hides from their wearers. It was a harvest. We were the harvesters.

Most of us were Western men and, as I have suggested, veterans of the Civil War, at loose ends, wanting adventure, feeling the discomfort of claustrophobia at being cooped up in houses and towns after adventure in war. And most of us were young. I, for instance, was hardly more than a kid, but in those days on the frontier men matured early, and I felt myself very much of a man in 1872. Some of the runners were older men, some of them mountain men who had watched the beaver peter out but wanted to make a fast dollar wherever they could.

In the beginning these older runners, with their more mature judgment and experience, made the better showing. They had the know-how. But in time we youngsters learned the ropes, and did all right.



I DECIDE TO JOIN THE MOB

Yes, I was just 22, but I had had a world of outdoor experience, and I was crazy about guns as most boys of 22 in those days were. And I could shoot with the best of them. And I was more restless, after serving in the Civil War as a bugler because I was too young to fight, than most of the others. And I had nothing to look forward to in civilization. I didn't know exactly what I wanted, and the chances are I got into the buffalo running business quite by accident.

I was hanging around Dodge (Dodge City, Kansas), like Micawber, waiting for something to turn up. It did, in the form of two older men. To me then they seemed ancient, but chances are both were around 35. One was named Bob McRae, the other Alex Vimy. They took an interest in me, but I was already interested in them, because they seemed to typify ideal citizens to me, rugged outdoorsmen to whom nothing of the arcana of the outdoors was secret.

Let me describe them, because I think they may be typical of men on the frontier of that day. McRae first. He was of Scotch descent, born in America. He was medium-sized, with blue-gray eyes, brown hair. He was an all-around shot, roper, killer, cook and skinner. He had punched cows, dealt faro. He ran away from a nagging wife to the quietude of the buffalo ranges. At least he claimed it was quiet in comparison.

Vimy had a blackish-red complexion, blue-black hair, jet black eyes. He was a French-Indian breed, born in Canada, a typical voyageur. He was the best knife and tomahawk thrower in the whole southwest, but only a fair shot. Vimy knifed a lumber jack in a squabble over a girl and had to take it on the run. He had one of his rival's ears with him as a pocket-piece. He was a God-send at your shoulder in time of crisis.

These two and I became fast friends, and I had the grace, years later, to place them side by side in a Waco cemetery (Catholic, although McRae was a rank Presbyterian). Bob wanted to sleep in Texas, and Vimy wanted to be where Bob was.

But I was telling you how I got into the Buffalo business.

I'd been listening to old fellows around saloons in San Antonio and elsewhere, and was all afire with the idea of being a real buffalo hunter. I mentioned it to McRae.

"I've been on one hunt," I told him, "and I liked it."

"Get many buff?"

"I got one."

"How much did it cost you to get him?" McRae asked.

"Oh, I don't know-maybe \$25."

"Know how much the skin's worth?"

"No."

"I'll tell you -- \$3. You're making money fast, son, aren't you?"

I remember my first buff. I was shooting a borrowed .50-70 Sharps carbine, Army issue, about as bad a gun as you could ask for. I hired a guide and a wagon outfit, and was off. We hadn't traveled very far till I spotted my first victim -- an old bull crawling out of a wallow where he'd been taking his mud bath. I stalked to within 200 yards, aimed at the butt of his neck as he stood broadside, fired. Down he went. It was as simple as that. And easy. Adventurous? No more than shooting a beef critter in the barnyard. And in my years of hunting I never found a particle more adventure in killing buffalo than on that first morning on the Red River, in what is now Oklahoma.

Part of my guide's business was to skin the kill. I told him to get busy while I sat back and smoked and admired myself. He was more adept with excuses than with a skinning-knife, and it took him half a day to pelt that old bull. I was out of money, after paying for the outfit, so for three weeks I lived off the flesh of that tough old buff. Do you wonder I never again touched a piece of buffalo meat unless forced by starvation to do so?

Now Bob McRae was talking to me, discussing the fine points of the craft.

"Never tell anybody you are a buffalo hunter," said he. "That brands you as a tenderfoot. Refer to yourself as a buffalo runner."

"Why a runner? We don't run buffalo the way you kill them," I remonstrated.

"Must be because we have to do a hell of a lot of running across the plains to find them," said Bob. "Do you want to go out on a trip with Alex and me?"

Did I? Did I?

"When do we start?" I said.

"Pretty soon now, kid. We'll show you how it's done."

I went. I saw how it was done. My nestors were experts.

On that trip we skinned out 198 hides and sold them for \$3 each. Bob generously insisted that I take my share of the boodle, one-fifth of the total. It looked like easy money. We had brush with Comanches -- nobody hurt -- and I came back to town with enthusiasm for buffalo running. In a

Philadelphia bank I had \$2,000. I sent for it. A few months later I was out on the plains with my own outfit.

I wasn't the only young fellow with that idea: I have already told you how crazy the Western half of the country went over the buffalo rush. Don't ask me how many runners were out after the muddy, dusty hides of the poor buffalo. I have heard it was as many as 20,000, but I believe that estimate to be high. I would rather put it around 10,000, counting everybody, the hunters, the skinners, drivers, cooks, and flunkies.

With that many men after him, the buffalo didn't really have a chance, and just a few years were enough to decimate the herds.

I'm often asked now what my feeling is toward myself that I helped wipe out a noble American animal by being a sort of juvenile delinquent with a high-power rifle. I always am frank in answering. I always say I am neither proud nor ashamed. At the time it seemed a proper thing to do. Looked at from a distance, however, I'm not so sure. The slaughter was perhaps a shameless, needless thing. But it was also an inevitable thing, an historical necessity.

What I mean by that is this: the buffalo served his mission, fulfilled his destiny in the history of the Indian, by furnishing him everything he needed -- food, clothing, a home, traditions, even a theology. But the buffalo didn't fit in so well with the white man's encroaching civilization -- he didn't fit at all, in fact. He could not be controlled or domesticated. He couldn't be corralled behind wire fences. He was a misfit. So he had to go.

And there was another reason, not so commonly known. You will understand it better when I tell you that the buffalo was hunted and killed with the connivance, yes, the cooperation, of the Government itself. That this will be denied I have little doubt. As I put my words down I weigh them.

Don't understand that any official action was taken in Washington and directives sent out to kill all the buff on the plains. Nothing like that happened. What did happen was that army officers in charge of plains operations encouraged the slaughter of buffalo in every possible way. Part of this encouragement was of a practical nature that we runners appreciated. It consisted of ammunition, free ammunition, all you could use, all you wanted, more than you needed. All you had to do to get it was apply at any frontier army post and say you were short of ammunition, and plenty would be given you. I received thousands of rounds this way. It was in 45-70 caliber, but we broke it up, remelted the lead, and some runners used government powder. I didn't. I was a stickler for the best, and used imported English powder which I will be describing to you in a little while. I had no trouble trading my government powder for things I wanted -- tobacco, bacon, flour, and other things.

Maybe you are wondering at the theory behind this. Let me tell you. I think I won't: I will let a high ranking officer in the plains service do it for me. One afternoon I was visiting this man in his quarters. The object of my visit you have guessed: free ammunition. I got it. Afterward we smoked and talked. He said to me:

"Mayer, there's no two ways about it: either the buffalo or the Indian must go. Only when the Indian becomes absolutely dependent on us for his every need, will we be able to handle him. He's too independent with the buffalo. But if we kill the buffalo we conquer the Indian. It seems a more humane thing to kill the buffalo than the Indian, so the buffalo must go," he concluded.

It wasn't long after I got into the game that I began to realize that the end for the buffalo was in sight. I resolved to get my share. I went into the business right. I invested every cent I owned in an outfit. I have no apologies for my participation in the slaughter. I hope that answers the question.



LEARNING THE ROPES

I was in the buffalo business all right but I soon discovered I had a good deal to learn about how it had to be conducted to be profitable. The harvest was ready but there was one harvester who wasn't ready for it. His name was Frank Mayer. I had had just enough training under McRae and Vimy to think I knew it all, a belief which speedily vanished when I was out on my own. But now it was sink or swim, and I had to teach myself how to run buffalo at a profit, which is what I wanted, profit. Nothing else counted. I already knew it wouldn't be fun.

It was fun to run after buffalo on a swift, spirited horse, and you could kill them that way, too, and it wasn't hard. A buffalo with its short legs and ponderous body, could run only two-thirds as fast as a good horse. You could give him a quarter-mile start and catch him before your horse had to call on its second wind. But it was hazardous. The prairie was honey-combed with prairie dog holes, and once your horse stepped into one of those and you were thrown and the thundering herd passed over you, you looked as if you had been run through a printing press running a page made up of quotation marks.

Once I remember seeing Bob McRae, chasing buff on horseback just for the hell of it, being thrown when his horse stumbled in a dog hole. Superb horseman, quick thinker in an emergency, Bob, while in midair, did the most spectacular thing I ever saw on the buffalo ranges. He threw himself onto the back of a nearby buffalo cow and rode her, bucking and jumping, very blithely to the edge of the stampeding herd. There he slid off quite nonchalantly and caught his horse, none the worse for what could have been a fatal experience. Not all buffalo chasers were so lucky. A good many lost their lives. So I gave up chasing buffalo on horseback as a bad gamble. I did occasionally run them that way and shoot them with a pistol, but that was always when I wanted to show off and be a hero in somebody's eyes.

The Indians didn't have any other way to get their meat supply. You see pictures of them driving arrows from their short bows into the ribs of buffalo, but usually an Indian on horseback preferred the lance to the arrow. His method was to run alongside his victim and jab a long-bladed lance into it just back of the ribs. One jab would never bring down a heavy buffalo, so he kept right after it, jab, jab, jab, until the poor critter toppled from loss of blood and cuts to his vital organs. But I was no Indian. I was a business man. And I had to learn a business man's way of harvesting the buffalo crop.

It always amused me at the inefficiency of some of the buffalo runners, who hunted on horseback, at the strange weapons they thought adequate to kill tough old buff. These weapons ranged all the way from cap and ball percussion revolvers to carbines and rifles of divers sorts, most of them single shot fusils. A few did affect repeating rifles or carbines, the majority of which were Spencer cabins and old gun-metal receiver Henry rifles, both rim fire. The Spencer was the more effective. It was .56 caliber and carried seven cartridges. Later on in the heel of the game quite a number of 44-40 '73 Model Winchesters came in, but they lacked the knock-down-and-drag-out qualities necessary for buffalo work. I have seen one full magazine (16 shots) expended on the final bagging of only five buffalo, and that, too, fired by a man who knew his business. Shooting from the back of a running horse was always uncertain. I wanted none of it. I wanted efficiency. That was my German nature to demand that.

As I told you earlier, some unknown genius of observation gave all of us runners our cue to killing buffalo. He probably made his discovery by accident. His discovery was simply this: if you wounded the leader, didn't kill her outright, the rest of her herd, whether it was three or thirty, would gather around her and stupidly "mill" -- which means poke her with their horns, strike at her with their hooves, and just generally lose their heads when they smelled her blood. When they were milling they didn't think of anything else. Buffalo, as I have indicated, were not notorious for their ability to think clearly on any subject. Now they were completely bewildered.

And all you had to do, as a runner, was pick them off one by one, making sure you made a dropping kill at every shot, until you wiped out the entire herd. Then you went to another and repeated the process. Do you see anything sporting about that? It was sheer murder. Yet that is the way we did it, we brave and glorious runners, who swaggered into frontier shipping towns and made boardwalks ring with the sound of our leather heels and the tinkle of our spurs.

I have worked hundreds of stands, as we called them, by this method, without losing a single animal I wanted. Now and then, though, when I crawled too close, to within 200 yards or less, I failed. Then the heavy report of my heavy Sharps would wake up the survivors and they would scamper over the plains. I wasn't very religious in my remarks when that occurred.

When a runner had worked his herd, he went on to the second, then onto the third, fourth, or as many as he figured his crew could skin out. The number of animals a runner could take at a stand varied. My largest was 59. But Billy Dixon, a famous runner, once took 120 hides without moving his rest sticks. A colonel I knew on the ranges told me of counting 112 carcasses within a space and took 54 hides with 54 cartridges. I didn't do quite so well with my run of 59: I used 62

cartridges. I never was a Bob McRae.

We never killed all the buff we could, but only as many as our skinners could handle. Every outfit had its quota, which was determined by the ambition and the number of skinners. My regular quota was twenty-five a day, but on days when my crew weren't tired, I sometimes would run this up to 50 or even 60. But there I stopped, no matter how plentiful the buff were. Killing more than we could use would waste buff, which wasn't important; it also would waste ammunition, which was.

The thing we had to have, we runners, we business men with rifles, was one-shot kills. And you had to learn the knack of that. When you consider that a full-grown buffalo would weigh almost a ton and was as hard to kill as a Kodiak bear, you will realize what a job it was. Dropping kills we termed these one-shotters.

I was amused, maybe, disgusted, certainly, a few years ago when I read in the Denver Post of a debacle which took place in the Denver Mountain Parks, where the city has kept a herd of buffalo for many years. The herd outgrew its pasture, and the city decided to kill eight animals to feed the poor on Christmas. Here is what happened:

"It required fifteen shots to kill one buffalo, from the modern high-power rifles used by the hunters -- .35 Remington, .30-30, and .30-'06," the report in the paper said.

"In another case two, five, and ten shots were needed. Only one single-shot death was chalked up. The execution was witnessed by Mayor George Begole, and once during the afternoon, when several shots were required for a death, he suggested:

"Get an Indian!"

Yes, an Indian or an old time plains buffalo runner, because we had to do better or we were bankrupt. At the low prices we got for hides we couldn't afford to miss; and naturally I didn't do so very often.

Of course not every shot made was a dropping kill; depended on where you hit. But nine in ten dropped instantly or within a space of one hundred feet. I had the habit of holding on the neck, and when hit there they dropped as if pole-axed. With the bullet's more than a ton in foot pounds energy at the muzzle, they generally dropped when fairly hit at almost any old distance.

I could give you hundreds of confirmatory instances, but shall confine myself to two: Once, in a burst of sheer bragadoccio, I bet Bill Tilghman (noted runner and peace officer) that I could kill a buffalo as far away as I could distinctly quarter his head with the cross hairs of my telescope sight. We hunted a whole day to find one. When we discovered him, I could only faintly outline the cross hairs on his whole body. That made him, by careful reckoning, a full half mile away. My first shot was in the upper edge of his paunch; it knocked him down as if he had been hit by a locomotive. When he got up again, I held more carefully and landed in his neck, just ahead of the shoulder. He went down kerplunk and stayed there. Bill paid: a three-gallon keg of "Three Roses."

Again, on the Staked Plains (Llano Estacada) in Texas, I stood off a band of young Comanche bucks. I opened fire at long range with my 40-90 to discourage their coming too close. In three shots at a distance afterward paced by my skinners at 759 yards, I got one buck and two horses. I distinctly saw the buck topple off his pony, and we found the two horses dead.

I reckon these incidents will show you the kind of shooting we had to do. Most of our shots were at 300 yards or beyond. At 300 yards we had to be able to shoot all day long and score one hundred per cent results. We had to do this to come out even. I once took 269 hides with 300 cartridges. This was business. We had no time to experiment or theorize.

Of course we had to have the right rifles, because no rifleman is ever a whit better than the rifle he's shooting. And the rifles used on the buffalo ranges were as motley as the men who used them. Remember that the killing began only some five years after the close of the Civil War and army rifles were in preponderant evidence all over the buffalo ranges. They weren't satisfactory for the simple reason that they weren't accurate.

Something more was demanded, and I have noticed that whenever anything is demanded quickly it is supplied. And this was true of buffalo rifles, which rapidly simmered down to two kinds, three, really, although the third came along too late to make much of a stir among the runners. It was the Ballard; quite satisfactory in accuracy and energy but because it had an ineffective and exasperating ejector it had you always in trouble; I owned one; I discarded it for everything but target use.

But the other two, ah, those were rifles if ever the term could be properly applied. They were the Remington and the Sharps. I think it's safe to say that eighty per cent of the buffalo killed were with either a Remington or a Sharps rifle. For their time and place, they were perfect.

There was little choice between them. Both were made in various calibers from .40 to .50, with varying cartridges to meet personal preferences. They were made in various weights, barrel lengths, sights, degrees of twist, and depth of rifling, with right or left drifts made to special order. Mostly, however, they were offered in regular "stock" dimensions -- barrels from 30 to 34

inches in length, weights from 10 to 16 pounds in the Sharps and from 8 to 12 pounds in the Remingtons. Both were furnished either with single triggers or with the preferable double set triggers of two separate types of adjustment.

The Sharps was made in 40 and 45 caliber as regular stock. The cartridge length was stamped on the breech, thus: 40-1 1/2 in., 40-2 1/2 in., 40-3 1/4 in. Sharps favored the straight shell, but made some for bottle-necked as well in 40 and 45 calibers, and also for the Remington 44-77 and 44-90. These would be stamped 40-90 B. N.

The Remingtons which the runners favored were nearly all of them for bottle-necked cartridges, and the two favorite calibers were 44-77 and 44-90. But you could order any caliber and any kind of cartridge you wanted; anything to please a customer was the rule of the Remington and Sharps companies.

The rifling of these pieces ran variously from four to six thousandths of an inch, but when paper patched bullets were employed it was shallower, seldom exceeding two-and-a half thousandths. In all Sharps rifles, above the 40-50 calibers the twist was uniformly one in sixteen inches. Quite often some crank like myself would have one specially built with quicker or slower twist, but these were always furnished against the earnest protests of the makers, who, incidentally, knew their business better than we faddists. I had thrown away a good many hard-earned dollars before I was freed of the delusion that I knew more about rifle-making than Christian Sharps.

We loaded our own ammunition; had to; factory-loaded stuff cost too much, was, besides, too hard to get when you were away off on the buffalo range. After my first season I chose my powder with meticulous care. Two leading brands of American powder were Dupont and Hazard, both good enough except they burned hot, dry, and cakey in the barrels, making cleaning a more or less unsatisfactory operation.

Then I accidentally got a one-pound canister each of Curtis & Harvey's and Pigou, Laurence & Wilks FG grained powder, made in England, both of which burned so decidedly moister and seemingly developed so much greater energy that I used them continually thereafter. I bought English powder from Tyron of Philadelphia. It cost 50 per cent more than American powder, but it was worth it.

We had some wild and woolly ideas about how to clean our rifle barrels, I remember. We first drenched them with cold water, succeeded by a dosage of urine, which was well shaken up and allowed to circumnavigate the bore. I suppose the slight ammonical content of this homely but efficient solvent did the trick. We followed this with a thorough drenching of hot water, and wiped the bore dry and finished it off with a rag saturated with graphited tallow. If not cleaned before firing, the rifle shot a few inches higher for the first shot. We generally wiped out clean before firing: cartridges were too expensive to take any chances.

It's common for modern riflemen to look down their noses at these old rifles of ours, dub them "smokesticks" and believe no accuracy is possible without a military type rifle and modern smokeless powder ammunition. I guess it doesn't do them any harm to believe in fairy tales, but let me tell you something: no rifles made could match these old Remingtons and Sharps we runners used.

Prove it? Sure. Why not? With carefully handloaded ammunition and perfectly adjusted telescope sights, we could make full possibles at any range from fifty to 500 yards. We could do it in the face of heavy wind, straight on, fishtail, or full cross currents. At distances above 500 and up to 1,000 yards, the 45-120-550 Sharps with patched bullets is absolutely unsurpassed by any weapon known to man. In these performances there are never any unaccountables with Sharps: the rifleman knows why the missiles went wrong and can instantly call them. Can this be done with any modern so-called "super-gun"? It cannot.

I have seen the 45-120-550 Sharps lay down 200 buffalo with just 200 shots, most of them at distances ranging from 300 to 600 yards. Is there any modern rifle, even the magnums, which could do that? Show it to me if you find it, will you?

Shooting at such long ranges, we, naturally, had to use telescope sights, and set triggers, which to me are a "must" for good rifle shooting. My own were so delicate that you could set the rifle off almost by a breath. The 'scopes we used then were so powerful no shooter could use one without rest sticks -20-and even 30-power, against the 2 1/2-, 4-, and 5-power telescopes in use now.

The use of rest sticks is forgotten now, but we runners couldn't have operated without them. You see pictures of buffalo runners prone while shooting their game, but that would have been fatal to your chances. Let me tell you why. A heavy rifle fired so close to the ground reverberates and causes more sound than one fired higher above it. So if you were prone while firing you would soon frighten your game away. We used rest sticks which put us about thirty inches above the ground: we either sat while we fired or fired from a kneeling position.

The sticks were a simple device; merely two pieces of hard wood, bolted together so as to provide a crotch in which you put the heavy barrel of your rifle. We didn't use sling straps which made you feel you were shooting from a straight-jacket, but merely rested the barrel, held the barrel and sticks steady with the left hand, which made shooting almost like using a bench rest.

When I went out on my first expedition with McRae and Vimy, McRae said to me: "Frank, have you got a poison vial?"

"Poison vial?" I repeated. "Never even heard of one. What's its purpose?"

"To save your scalp."

"To save my scalp?"

"That's right."

And then McRae explained the poison vial or tube, which he invented and which became common with runners on all ranges. One day he came upon the body of a teamster, who had been stripped, scalped while alive, his privates cut off and stuck into his mouth and fastened there with a sinew cord. Fat pine splinters had been stuck into his flesh from ankles to chin until he resembled a hedgehog. These were ignited at his feet, causing an upward slow flame which literally roasted him alive. His body had been fastened to a dead tree trunk with his own chains.

"No Indian will scalp a dead man," McRae explained. "And wouldn't you rather have a quick painless death from poison than a tortured lingering death like that teamster? Always carry this," handing me a device made by sticking a .40 caliber shell inside a .45 caliber. I took them apart. Inside the .40 caliber shell was a very thin glass tube, like a test tube, filled with a whitish powder.

"Hydrocyanic acid," McRae explained. "If Indians seem fit to capture you, bite hard on the tube. It's sure medicine against scalping and torture."

Thereafter I carried my tube religiously. I never had to "bite the white," as we used to put it, but I know of two instances of runners who did. Their bodies had not been mutilated or even scalped after death.

I was catching onto the ropes, fast, it seemed.

I still had a lot to learn, though, and one of the most important things I had to learn was how you found buffalo to shoot.

You would think with so many million buffalo on the loose that you could cast about in any direction and find some. But that wasn't true. Drive over the states that comprised the range. Distances are far; it was a big country. And the buffalo were always on the move. So we had to ride far and hard to spot them, and often we would go for days and see not more than a handful of the beasts. There was no freemasonry on the ranges at all: it was every man for himself. And if a runner discovered a nice bunch of buff, he didn't advertise the fact. He cleaned 'em out as fast as he could, before some other runner moved in on him.

There were no such things as established boundaries of operations. Where we found the buff we were monarchs of all we could survey -- and kill. It was a generally established rule that no man should butt in on a herd that was being worked by its first locator. Violation of these ethics was likely to lead to shooting at something else than buffaloes, but it didn't, usually, go that far. Usually a warning to the interloper was enough to send him elsewhere. I became pretty good at warning others off my private preserves.

I came to learn that skinning was a dirty, disagreeable, laborious, uninspiring job. I didn't, naturally, do any skinning. I was the hunter, the killer, and skinning was for skinners. But I felt sorry for the poor fellows, out in the hot sun, fighting flies, and wrestling with a 150-pound wet buffalo hide. But it was their part in the game. There was once a lazy skinner who tried to find an easy way to skin a buff; a commendable idea. He drove a heavy iron picket-pin through the animal's head, anchoring it to the ground. Then he hitched a team to the hide near the neck and simply yanked the hide off. This worked-sometimes. And sometimes it didn't. It often tore the hide in two. We tried it for a couple of days in our outfit, and then I told my boys that henceforth we were going to hand-skin every buff we killed, and we did. Careful skinning is one reason why I always commanded top prices for my hides.

Caring for hides was simple. All we did was to peg them out, flesh side up, around camp. In a few days they dried, and then we rolled them lengthwise in lots of ten, tied them into a bale, loaded twenty to thirty-five bales, weighing anywhere from 6,000 to 9,000 pounds, into our big wagon, and drove to market.

And marketing was no problem. Buyers at every frontier offered cash for hides, which were in demand in "the States" for a wide variety of purposes -- blankets, sleigh and buggy robes, coats, heavy leather, and God knows what else. I sold mine wherever I happened to be, in Dodge, Denver, Laramie City. Because of the care I gave my hides, I always commanded premium prices. During my years on the range, I had no trouble, because buyers trusted me and I them.

During the latter years of buffalo running there was a market for meat as well as hides, and often buyers would take the whole animal with hide left on. Buyers would pay up to four cents a pound for meat, but the price was usually two and a-half cents. Buffalo tongues were in demand

toward the tail end of the business also. Smoked and packed in large barrels they brought up to 25 cents apiece. I remember I sold one lot for fifty cents; an agent for the Carlton Club of London bought them. He paid me \$500 for 1,000 tongues.

All these things about the buffalo business I learned piece-meal, mostly from McRae and Vimy but from other runners also, because I was always willing to listen to counsel from whatever source. I hunted with most of the big chiefs of the business, and then one day I judged I was about ready to strike out on my own. I tell you that was a big day in my life, when I mounted the driver's seat of my high wagon, and headed my twelve-mule team out toward the vast expanse of plains, where there were the million or more buffalo I hoped to harvest.

OUT ON MY OWN

That \$2,000 I had in a Philadelphia bank just about paid for my outfit, and left me strapped. Little did I care. I'd make it up the first month, I kept telling myself, the very first month. A buffalo outfit was simple, and I could have made mine simpler but I wanted to do things up brown. All you needed was horses or mules, wagons, camp equipment, and firearms, and you were in business.

I bought two wagons in St. Joseph, Missouri. The big one, drawn by twelve mules, we used in hauling hides; the small one, drawn by six mules, was our camp wagon. Both were equipped with nine-inch tread flat iron wheels and steel boxes or bed of 1 8-inch steel. I remember what I paid for the big wagon -- \$650. I remember what I paid for the small one -- \$400. I already had a couple of good saddle horses, which I went to much pains to train. I taught them to lie flat while I was shooting at game, so as to avoid detection by roving Indians. We always used American horses because they were bigger, stronger, more dependable than the mustangs or Indian ponies which the Indians used because they didn't have anything better. A good buffalo horse, though, was worth real money on the range, anywhere from \$250 to \$500.

No use to describe camp equipment. We took along the usual things, bedrolls, tents, cooking utensils. All cost a lot of money, more than they would today, even with our inflationary spiral. Remember this was on the buffalo ranges, where over 10,000 men were bidding against one another for the necessities of the life they had chosen for themselves. We paid the price and liked it. But it left me broke.

I'll linger on the rifles I chose, however, because these were much more important than the bed I slept in or the kind of stove over which I cooked my bacon and coffee.

As I have told you, I lived among rifles all my life, and shot everything from a flintlock to the most modern rifles of the day. And I listened intently to the arguments that went on over the campfires about the respective merits of the Remington and the Sharps. Both had fierce partisans and often during the arguments it would seem these runners would start proving the superiority of their choice by using them on other runners, they were so perfervid in defence of their rifles.

And both had points in their favor, and both Remington and Sharps had expert men using them. McRae, for instance, was a Remington man; 44-90 was his caliber. Dixon was a Sharps man. So it went, every man to his choice, every man willing to fight for his choice if he had to. So here I was, having to make a decision.

I decided to throw in with Christian Sharps and be what was called a Sharps man. There were certain features about the rifles made by this genius of Bridgeport, Connecticut, that I didn't find in the Remington. So I bought my first Sharps rifle. It was a 40-90-420, as sweet as a piece of ordnance as you would ever see.

In those days 1871-1875 rifles were expensive, for they would cost you from \$100 to \$150, not including the necessary telescope sight. So a man would think twice before deciding on the rifle he wanted. I know I did. I would stay awake at night asking myself which would it be, a Remington or a Sharps? And I'd wake up in the morning asking myself the same question. There was so little to choose between them that either choice would have been the right one. What decided me was two things in favor of the Sharps: it used a straight cartridge, which was less likely to swell and become distorted after being fired a dozen times; the Sharps had the stronger action and was more dependable, I thought, in a pinch. With the Remington you opened the breech by pulling back on an ear on the breech block on top; you opened the good old Sharps by yanking down on the big trigger-guard, just as you use a modern lever action rifle.

I never regretted my choice of a Sharps, and McRae and other Remington men never regretted their choice either, so everybody was happy.

Let me tell you about the first Sharps of mine.

I bought it second-hand from Colonel Richard Irving Dodge there was a man! . Sportsman, military leader, expert rifleman, skilled hunter, gentleman -- to me Colonel Dodge will always typify everything fine in American manhood. Besides, he had several Sharps rifles, I had none, so I set out to convince him we ought to share the wealth a little bit. It wasn't easy. The rifle I set my eyes on was practically new, a 40-90-420, as I have told you. It was a beautiful piece, with its imported walnut stock and forearm, and its shiny blue 32-inch barrel. At \$125 I considered it a bargain. This Sharps weighed 12 pounds. On the barrel I mounted a full-length one-inch tube telescope, made by A. Vollmer of Jena, Germany. Originally the 'scope, a 20-power, came with plain crosshairs. These I supplemented with upper and lower stadia hairs, set so they would cover a vertical space of thirty inches at 200 yards.

I was proud of that first Sharps of mine, which I still own, incidentally; and when I took it out and levelled it at my first buffalo, or bison, I was prouder still. I found I could kill the toughest bull that ever followed the trail to the water hole, and do it with one well-placed slug. At first it used a 320-grain bullet, but I experimented with one a hundred grains heavier, and thereafter used the 420-grain projectile. It killed quicker. In making this change I didn't sacrifice anything in velocity, because by then I had begun to use the English powder I have told you about, and it added 10 to 30 percent efficiency to my shooting.

After a year or two, having plenty of buffalo dollars in my jeans, I talked myself into believing that I needed an extra rifle in reserve -- so I bought two. One was a 40-70-320 -- a light little gun for deer and antelope but too impotent for buff. The other was another 40-90-420. Both used bottle-necked cartridges; don't ask me how I fell for that sort of thing after vowing I was off bottle-necks for life. I paid \$100 for the 40-70, \$115 for the 40-90 -- current prices then. Prices on Sharps declined rapidly after the buffalo years, and I saw \$40, and \$50 -- identical with the guns I paid \$100 and \$125 for a couple of years earlier. I never liked either of these guns, because the bottle-necked cartridges began giving me trouble.

I don't know how well you know riflemen or gun nuts, as we are rightly called. We are a dissatisfied segment of humanity, always seeking something better than we have. I was no exception. Here I was, with a battery of fine rifles, one in particular, the Col. Dodge Sharps, that would kill anything that walked on the American continent, including Indians, of which my Sharps had killed a few. And I should have been satisfied, nay, happy. But I was dissatisfied, unhappy, frustrated. And do you know the reason? Christian Sharps had announced that he had brought out a new rifle, a rifle to end all rifles, the greatest of all Sharps. And I simply had to have one.

It was stamped on the receiver "Sharps Old Reliable," and it was a 45 caliber, described as 45-120-550 -- which means the bore was 45 1000 in diameter, the powder load was 120 grains, and the lead slug it propelled weighed 550 grains. That would be something, I told myself; yes, that would be! And I knew when I read about it the first time, my life would be blighted until I owned one. So I bought one.

I rationalized a good deal over it, telling myself that I needed more shock which I didn't , more killing power I had no trouble with my 40-90-420 on that score , and more range but my 40-90 did all right by itself . So I didn't need the bigger gun at all, and that may be the reason why I bought one -- I didn't need it. Actually there wasn't too much difference between the two in shock, range, or accuracy. But it was a new rifle, and I had to have one.

I was never sorry for a minute that I bought it, because this rifle, the "Old Reliable" Sharps, which was quickly dubbed the "Sharps Buffalo," became unquestionably the best, the deadliest rifle ever made in America. Now don't go calling me an old fogey and telling me I am living in the past. I'm not. I know all American rifles from the flitlocks of Revolutionary times to the moderns of mid-century America, and I tell you if my life depended on one shot from one rifle and I could take my choice, I'd rather have my old "Sharps Buff" in my hands than any other gun. Does that convince you?

Only 2,000 of these rifles were made, because they came in right at the heel of the buffalo days and the market evaporated almost overnight and Christian Sharps had nothing to do but destroy his jigs and turn his hand to other rifles; the market for the big boy was done. Of the 2,000 that were made, how many exist today? I own mine. I have seen, of late years, three or four others. I know many riflemen, collectors, who have never laid eyes on one.

There was a price barrier, too, that kept the rifle from enjoying dime-store popularity. I paid for mine exactly \$237.60, which in 1875 was a small fortune to tie up in two pieces of walnut, a heavy piece of octagonal steel with a hole down the middle, and a big side hammer that could be cocked in the coldest weather with mittens on. The rifle weighed 16 pounds, so it wasn't

anything for a frail woman to carry too many times up and down stairs. Mine was equipped with double triggers, essential for me in doing decent shooting, and a 20-power Vollmer 'scope identical to the one on my 40-90.

On paper these old rifles don't show up so well when set alongside modern rifles, but when you are shooting game as we did you aren't computing on paper-you are counting hides. And I never found anything more deadly than the 40-120-550...

I know that a rifle with only 1,400 feet of velocity sounds very archaic when set alongside the moderns with their 3,000-foot velocity; one American rifle has over 4,000 feet velocity. But I can't imagine having to shoot a buffalo fifteen times with one of my Sharps to make him stay down. Once was enough. They carried authority, these old Sharps.

These Sharps used paper-patched bullets, made to my specifications, one part tin to sixteen parts lead; none of this hard-nose, steel-covered foolishness you have today. The sixteen-to-one formula gave us just enough hardness to penetrate and enough lead softness to mushroom. We didn't have much paper on the buffalo ranges, so we had to find a substitute for our patches. I used antelope buckskin, pulled and stretched real thin. It worked fine. I loaded my own cartridges, not because I liked to, because loading was a tedious job after a day in the hot sun on the range: I did it because it was cheaper. Factory ammunition cost 25 cents a round, but we could hand-load for half that, so we handloaded.

As I have told you, I wasn't particular where I hunted, just so there were plenty of buffalo. That is the reason I wandered over all the ranges, except the far northern one, and there was no telling where I would show up. It didn't matter. It was a peripatetic life, full of hazard, full of hot dirty work, because killing is never pleasant or easy, but I was young, I had no ties, and I didn't mind being on the go.

Over the years I worked up a small, tidy little organization, never over five men. Some runners had trouble keeping skinners, drivers, cooks, and other necessary employees. But I never did. It was because I divided share and share alike with my men, whereas some runners took half, and divided the other half among the men. I would deduct expenses, and then we split the rest equally among ourselves, into four parts, or five, or however many there were in the crew. So we never had any trouble with strikes or absenteeisms.

Every day went about the same. Long before daylight I'd be up and have breakfast, then set out alone on my horse to work the herd. I had scouted ahead, so I knew approximately where the buff would be. Before it got light enough to shoot I could see the dim outlines of the animals, which would be quietly cropping grass or lying down. I would maneuver to get them into a gully if I could. Then I would set my sticks at least 300 yards away, seeking some kind of protection from which to shoot -- soapweeds, a buffalo wallow to hide in, tall grass.

As soon as dawn came and I could see clearly through my telescope sight, I would start in. But before I fired my first round, I would coolly estimate how many animals my skinners, usually two or three of them, could care for that day. That many cartridges, plus four or five extras, just in case, I withdrew from my belt and spread out in front of me in the grass. When they were used up, I quit. My favorite holds were neck and heart, and whenever I hit a buffalo in those places I didn't have to inquire whether he was down for good.

The extra cartridges? They had two purposes, one of far more importance than the other. There was always a chance I would miss, but I didn't very often. Still, I could, you know. But mostly they were my "good medicine" cartridges for any Indians that wanted to dispute my right on their domain. I needed to use them a couple of times; when I come to describe the incidents that kept our life from being too boring, I shall tell you about those times.

As soon as I had made my quota for the day, I would get my horse to his feet, mount, and report to the boys. Then they would hitch up, and we would move camp to the scene of the kill. While the skinners grumblingly went to work skinning and fighting the ubiquitous flies, I rested and smoked. Touch a skinning-knife? Not on your life! We had caste on the buffalo ranges, and I wouldn't put a skinning-knife in my hand. I was exalted, a runner, not a skinner.

Harder than actual shooting was finding buff to shoot, and that was my job also. I'd have to scout at the end of the day to find where the next day's shooting would take me. And it sometimes took me miles from camp.

The buffalo lived on a peculiar grass that carpeted the plains, called to this day buffalo grass. The plow has treated the grass as ruthlessly as the Sharps did the buff, and you will travel over many a Western mile before you will find a decent stand of it left. In the Spring the buff would begin working northward, to escape the hot Southern plains Summers. They would migrate till early Fall, then turn tail and go southward to escape the rigors of a Northern winter. They were always on the go, and wherever they went you would find Mayer following them, destroying them, and trying to make a fortune while doing it.

We hunted along the courses of the streams, and my hunting peregrinations took me along

nine rivers: the Brazos, the Red, the Cimarron, the Canadian, the Arkansas, the Solomon, the Republican, the Platte, and the Niobrara. Study the course of these rivers today, if you will, and you will find them lined with names of prosperous, thriving, modern cities and towns. But not in those days. Then there were occasional little towns, but mostly it was vast ocean of buffalo grass, with only buffalo, antelope, and infrequent camps of plains Indians.

We didn't know it then, and if we did we wouldn't have cared, but we runners were opening the way for the cattleman with his free range and vast herds, later for the nester, and later still for drive-ins, hamburger palaces, women's clubs, and parity farm prices.

Now and then we'd bump into other runners, but we runners were a peculiar bunch and resented any encroachments on our staked-out territory. So there wasn't too much friendliness when we did meet, except in town, where no trade secrets would be spilled. Still, I managed to stay on friendly terms with most of the runners. We all had practically the same experiences, and when I tell you what happened to me, you will know what happened to the others who had the chance to be on the ranges when there was something else on them besides farm mortgages.

I FIND THE LIFE HARD, THE PAY SMALL

Thus far I haven't said a word about the money I made as a buffalo runner. I suppose maybe the reason is that I am reluctant to admit that I didn't make a fortune. I just got by. And I want to be as frank in discussing the economics of my life as a buffalo runner as the rifles we used or the methods we followed.

When I went into the business, I sat down and figured that I was indeed one of fortune's children. Just think! There were 20,000,000 buffalo, each worth at least \$3 -- \$60,000,000. At the very outside cartridges cost 25 cents each, so every time I fired one I got my investment back twelve times over. I could kill a hundred a day, \$300 gross, or counting everything, \$200 net profit a day. And \$200 times thirty, would be, let me see, \$200 times thirty -- that would be \$6,000 a month -- or three times what was paid, it seems to me, the President of the United States, and a hundred times what a man with a good job in the '70's could be expected to earn. Was I not lucky that I discovered this quick and easy way to fortune? I thought I was. I had dreams of opulence in a short time, and what if the life was hard, the hazards present all the time? The end was worth whatever it cost. I would buy a big house, wear a silk stove-pipe hat, marry a beautiful girl, and rear a large family of stalwart sons, not one of whom would ever have to touch a rifle or drink out of a polluted buffalo wallow.

Oh, those were fine dreams! But they never did seem to materialize exactly. Always something coming up, some damned thing that took all the profit away. One time, because of a long rainy spell, about a fourth of the hides would spoil while drying. Or I would go into a new country and find it completely shot out, as frequently happened. Now and then, in spite of my care and skill as a stalker, the buff would spook mysteriously, and all I would get for my pains was a horseback ride back to camp. And sometimes... well, there was always something.

I suppose hunters have to be like gold prospectors, though, always thinking that tomorrow would be better. Most men had more sense than I. They tried it for one season or two, and then got wise, and quit. I was one of those stubborn Dutchmen who didn't know when he was licked. I stayed on. I really think I was a runner, off and on, for ten years; at running exclusively for six, which makes me the marathon dunce of the buffalo ranges. But always there was that dream that next season, yes, next season in an entirely new place, I'd recoup my losses, and make that fickle jade Fortune stand and deliver what I had coming to me.

Not that I actually lost money, you understand; just that I didn't make what I thought I should make. In a little while, when I adjust my glasses and go over some old account books, I'll tell you exactly what my take was during my best years on the range. And it will astonish you that it was so small, for the work I did, the skill I employed, the dreams I wasted.

The hell of it was that presently -- within a year or a year and a-half after I got into the business -- we hit what I now know is called diminishing returns. We called it a scarcity of buff. It was. The more he was hunted and hounded the wilder the buffalo became, and with, say, 5,000 rifles a day levelled at him, it wasn't long until there was very little him, or her, left to shoot. So we had to spend more and more time in the wagons exploring one range after another. We didn't have Geiger counters or scout airplanes or even a dependable communications to tell us where we might find buff. We did it the hard way, riding miles and miles and miles in a stiff Mexican

saddle over the uncharted plains, looking into every gulley and prowling around every stream bed, on the off chance that we would find a "sleeper" herd -- this is to say, a herd that some other runner had overlooked.

All this took time, days of time, and expenses went on, even if the barrel of my rifle was cold for weeks on end. And my dreams of fortune -- they grew dimmer and dimmer as the months went by. But I stuck. I was no quitter. But I was fast becoming a bankrupt, I'll tell you.

My first two years (1872-1873) I did right well, considering the value of the dollar in those days. My account books show that my share for the two years--that is to say, the net--was right around \$6,000. I didn't make as much the first year (\$2,900) as the second, when I turned in a profit of \$3,100. This was on hides alone. My third year, however (1874), was my big year on the range; after that I slid down to nothingness. By that time I had gone into the smoked tongue, specimen bull heads, and meat business as side issues. I know exactly what I grossed and netted this year... (\$5,435) was my gross; my net came to \$3,124 -- and that was my big year on the buffalo ranges. Let some other men tell you about earning \$50,000, \$60,000 a year -- I am telling the truth.

So you see our running was not all cream. I wouldn't do the same amount of hard work, take the same chances again for any man's \$50,000. I couldn't if I wanted to -- and I don't want to. On my first two years, deducting interest on investment, overhead, and so forth, I barely came out even; I think my net for the two years was around \$2,800. And a little over \$100 a month is mighty poor pay for the financial and physical output, not counting liability to disease and violent death!

When I finally sold out and quit, I had less than \$5,000 on deposit, to show for nine years of hard work and sweat. Of course I blew in at least that much, or more, in the various ways a young fool can always find if he looks for them. And I looked a heap, with both eyes wide open.

I am quite confident that I was among the highest rewarded five men on the range. I have since talked to a dozen of the runners I knew and one and all remarked, "Well, you got more out of it than any feller I know of."

So I am quite safe in my surmise that a good high average of all the runners engaged was less than \$1,000 per year net. All fantastic tales of "enormous" profits in the game were simply the distorted visions of some magazine writer who wouldn't know buffler meat from domesticated bull rump.

It is only fair to say that had I been able to save and sell all the meat of the animals killed in 1874, I would have netted about \$5,000 more than I actually did. But much meat spoiled unavoidably and the market wasn't as active as it should have been. Besides, it entailed too much time as well as work in preparing the meat and in hauling it into the railroad. In my last full year on the range, I sold less than \$2,000 worth of hides, but realized over \$4,000 for meat alone. But overhead was so great that I could not find my heart any longer in the game, so I quit.

There was one particular phenomenon that kept us in hopes and many of us going. It was sort of like a brass ring you try for on a merry-go-round. It was a hide of such peculiar softness and beauty that it resembled silk; hence the name we runners gave these hides, "silks." They had long, silky hair. But don't ask me what caused it, because I don't know, and I never talked to anyone else who could explain it. I suppose the scientific explanation is that they were what is referred to in genetics as sports; variations that just happen, no one knows why or how. And we runners didn't stop to inquire. We knew -- and this was sufficient for our simple and practible purposes -- that whenever we got our hands on a silk, we had a hide worth five to ten times what the ordinary hide was worth. And that warmed our hard, cold hearts. I sold may silks for as much as \$50. But they were rare: in processing I don't know how many buffalo hides, my own and those killed by other runners, I come across only about ninety silks, maybe about one in 500 or 1,000. We always held the silks out and sold them separately. As I recollect it, I sold about twenty at the high figure of \$50.

We sold our hides rolled, not folded, and, as I have already told you, in bales of ten. I sold them where I could, which was wherever I happened to be at the moment. Later on, buyers came to our hunting camp and bought them "F.O.B. Camp," so to speak, which made it easier for us because we didn't have any hauling to do.

Mostly my choice of markets was Dodge City and Denver. I also sold many hides to Wells-Fargo on consignment. Wells-Fargo agents I found to be square shooters, and I realized my best prices while dealing with them. It not only saved us time and trouble to consign, but we could also get advances -- that is, we runners who were accorded a certain degree of responsibility could. I was once advanced \$1,500 by one of the Wells-Fargo boys against my guarantee I would turn in to him my season's kill. He paid me an additional \$2,300 or so when I finally showed up at the end of the season.

Selling was no problem but it got to be tougher and tougher as the years went on to get

something to sell, and when I got out of it altogether I didn't have the big house on the hill, or the silk stovepipe hat, or the stalwart sons; couldn't even afford to have that beautiful girl wife I dreamed so much about. The fact is that I earned little more than the average office worker of the day would have earned. But I wouldn't have changed places with any of these gentry for the world. If I didn't get rich at the business, I was rich in adventures, some of which stir me when I think of them to this very day.

BUT ADVENTURES RELIEVE THE MONOTONY

When I reflect on what I've been telling about my years on the buffalo ranges, I realize that I've made the life sound rather drab and monotonous. And so it was. But there were stirring and exciting and dangerous incidents, just enough of them, to keep it uncertain and exciting -- and these incidents added the leaven we needed to keep going. We had the usual run of frontier storms, cloudbursts, floods, lightnings, droughts, grasshopper infestations, dog days, and other natural phenomena. But of these I won't speak. But let me recount some of the incidents I was involved in that were in the human equation.

This could mean only Indian incidents, never white bad men experiences. No runner I ever heard of was ever highjacked out of a single hide or held up by a bandit. Those white bad men knew enough not to try; knew us runners to be the saltiest goddam men on the Western frontier; knew if they started anything all they'd get for their trouble was a 550-grain slug in their bellies, a diet no bad man ever fancied. So they gave us wide berth.

But the Indians, no. Them we had with us all the time, annoying us, trying to bushwhack us, generally making nuisances of themselves. And I don't blame them for their resistance. They sensed, if they weren't smart enough to know, and mostly they were, that we were taking away their birthright and that with every boom of a buffalo rifle their tenure on their homeland became weakened and that eventually they would have no homeland and no buffalo. So they did what you and I would do if our existence were jeopardized: they fought. They fought with everything they had, in every way they knew. They fought by stealth. They fought openly. They murdered if they had a chance. They stole whenever they could.

They created the incidents in our lives. There are hundreds of these that I do not like to recall and they had better not be told. The lines of our lives in the '70's were brutally hard and unfortunate happenings were not uncommon. I realize that some people like to wallow in blood and that they expect gory recitations from anyone who talks of the Old West. They are going to be disappointed in me: I never killed except from sheer necessity in self-defense, and telling about even these killings distresses me today. Not that I am sorry for anything I ever did: I would do it over again if similar occasions demanded it, and I would not lose any sleep in consequence.

But I will give you a sampling of the adventures which kept our life from being too monotonous.

Before I start with adventures among the Indians, or Indios, as we runners called them, to prove we were students of Spanish, let me tell you about the two buffalo stampedes I was in, because those were incidents, if I ever knew the meaning of the word.

The first one wasn't so bad, but the second...

One day I was riding down a draw in Western Kansas, dozing in the saddle. I woke with a start when my horse bolted and I heard the roar that could mean only one thing: buffalo stampede. I was right in the midst of it, with my horse gone crazy with fright. He wanted to run, so I let him; it was the only way to save him and me. I spurred him on, and we ran among a brown sea of heaving backs. I imagine there were 5,000 buff in that melee. I began outrunning them one by one, and edging toward the left, where I could see the farther side of the stampeding herd. By taking an oblique course, I was presently on the fringe of the herd, and once clear I wheeled sharply to the left, and was out of it for good. Then I rode to the top of the hill, dismounted, and enjoyed the spectacle of the stampede from a safe vantage point. It wasn't too exciting, but it would have been if my horse had stepped into a dog hole or lost his footing.

That was the first stampede I was in. The second... I lose sleep over it to this day when I think of what a narrow squeak we had that Sunday morning when our camp was overrun. The way it happened was this. Our camp was on the North Canadian. The month was August, 1873, but I have forgotten the exact date. It isn't important. Only I know it was on a Sunday because

we were all present.

I had just finished reloading a batch of hulls, and was thinking of going out and getting an antelope for camp meat, when I heard a low rumbling like distant thunder. As it was a clear cloudless day I knew it couldn't be thunder. I was lying flat on my back when I first heard it. When I got to my feet the sound was not perceptible. None of the outfit sitting or walking about were aware of it. You know sound is better heard when your ear is close to the ground; that is, sounds originating on the surface of the earth. Well, out in the open one soon gets cognizant of many things that escape the casual observer. Knowing intuitively what it was, I jumped to my feet yelling: "Buffalo stampede! Coming straight this way! Turn the wagons broadside and get your rifles -- quick!"

The others gaped in surprise; they hadn't heard anything; but they were used to obeying orders without question. They hustled pronto!

We had barely gotten fixed for them when the noise became clear to all. I directed my men to positions from which they could fire between the wagon wheels. Every man put his shells into his hat, where he could reach them fast.

"Concentrate your fire on a certain point, a single point. Maybe we can split the herd so it will pass on both sides of the wagons," I ordered.

Our mules and saddle horses were, fortunately, at graze in a grassy basin about a mile away.

As it chanced, old Bob McRae was visiting us in camp that day to get a shot of corn whiskey, so there were six of us to do the splitting: cook-driver, three skinners, Bob, and I. Really we were the equal of eight, because Bob was past master in everything pertaining to buffler and the most self-contained man and best shot on buffalo in the world.

By my order, we reserved fire until the vanguard was within about 400 yards. Bob and I were stationed on the extreme ends of our spread. Our cook Augustin and a skinner named Antoine were in the middle. The other two skinners were in between, so we had a solid phalanx of six good men and true. Bob was carrying a .56-56 repeating carbine; I had my 45-120 Sharps; the other four had .50-70 needle guns.

The herd came on in an exceedingly solid front and for a few seconds I had a qualmish feeling in my stomach. But a buffalo went down at my first shot and another at Bob's, and with the roar of the four .50-70's there was a heap of them piled up at one spot. Over this the rear guard tumbled and sprawled until it looked as if it were raining buffalo. The herd began to split up at the first volley, scampering away diagonally from that heap obstacle. We kept right on firing as rapidly as we could, always at the objective point, until at last they split completely, going off in two directions and missing our wagons by a wide margin.

I had fired eleven shots, and Bob emptied two magazines of eight shells each, and the other four had fired twenty-two shots among them. So there were 48 shots fired during a period of about five minutes actual shooting time. When we counted noses there were thirty-seven dead and crippled buffalo, out of which (almost incredibly, for, as I have told you, they were rare) there were five "silks."

It was five minutes of high life, and I am glad I lived them. But I never wanted a repeat on them, I'll tell you.

The menace from Indians was prevalent all the time. What could you expect with Apaches and Comanches in the south; Sioux, Crows, and Blackfeet in the north; with Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and minor tribes too numerous to mention around us most of the time? it was not a continuous jamboree, of course, but we had to be on our guard all the time. Everybody, white, red, yellow, or breed, carried chips on their shoulders and the chips were frequently being knocked off.

Pawnees were the only Indians who were "good." Some of the others pretended to be friendly, but if you let detached groups of younger braves get close enough for practical petting, you had a surprise coming. You sure had! Indians were always ready to take advantage of you. I made it a rule to keep them at a comfortable distance.

That a considerable number of runners were done in by the Indians there is no doubt. We'd find them, scalped, of course, sprawled out on the prairie, their clothing gone, their rifles stolen. Mostly the Indians killed for loot, rather than to protect their homes, although they were vociferous in giving that as their motive for fighting the whites. There were no James Fenimore Cooper "Uncas" types among the Indians of the region I hunted over, and, just between you and me, I doubt if there ever was such an animal among the "noble Redman."

I am loath to talk of encounters with the Indians, the poor cusses, because they were always so distasteful to me, but I will recall a few.

One day while hunting on the eastern edge of the Llano Estacado in Texas, I had just downed my quota and was arising to go to my horse when I saw a spurt of dirt fly from the ground just above my right ear. Almost simultaneously I felt a blow on the arm of my hunting

shirt and on looking down saw an arrow buried to the barb still clinging to my sleeve. As I threw a shell into the breech of my Sharps I saw two Indians streaking it away toward a little clump of trees where three ponies were tied. Knowing that I had them at my mercy when afoot, I killed all three of the ponies where they stood.

It was a little clump of trees, not more than ten or a dozen. It stood in thick brush. After waiting awhile I made the "friends" sign and rode my horse in the "come to me" circle. For a short time nothing happened. Then knowing I was in plain sight and in good seeing light, I repeated the signs, then tapped my rifle suggestively. I inspected the brush through my scope, and made out three forms. Growing impatient, I fired just close enough to the head of one that I saw him involuntarily duck at the whistle of the bullet.

Again I made the "friends" sign and impressively reloaded the old Sharps. At that, one of them rose and walked out in the open, shortly followed by another, sign signing "friends." The other lay hidden until another bullet sent a little too close for comfort brought him reluctantly out. To my great surprise it was a white man!

Waving in the direction of my camp, about a mile away, I signalled for them to go there. I kept them beyond arrow range but in easy rifle shot and herded them into camp to the surprise of the outfit. I ordered them tied up.

The two bucks were young Poncas, the white man was a mean-looking cuss who kept his head hanging down. The Poncas said they had, at the suggestion of the white fellow, just tried to scare me away from the kill. They hadn't intended to kill me, they said, just scare me away. The white man refused to talk.

The skinners were for killing them out of hand and I had difficulty in restraining them. But they all joyfully acquiesced in a plan I suggested instead:

We had the Poncas strip the white cuss stark naked and tie him to a wagon wheel. Then, with our blacksnake whips, I ordered them to thresh him good. They did so. That dirty renegade squealed like a jackrabbit! We untied him at length, pointed toward the Ponca reservation, and told them all to "Vamos, pronto!" It took them just about two minutes to put three hundred yards between them and us. Just for good measure, I fired a couple of shots that threw gravel over them as they topped the hill. I think they must still be running! The reservation was about sixty miles away and I don't know if they made it, and even to this day don't much care.

I recollect one more fracas that was more serious and not so one-sided. In the Summer of '76 I was trekking westward from the Rosebud (in Montana) in company with "Deadshot Charlie," a locally famous army scout, and a time-expired soldier named Tim Foley. Charlie and myself were carrying Remington 44-90's; Foley had his army .50-70.

The third day out we passed a rather deep buffalo wallow situated in the middle of wide basin among encircling low hills.

"Looks like a good place in which to stand off an Indian attack," I remarked, not having anything else interesting to say!

The basin in its lowest center contained a small pool. There was neither brush nor timber on the encircling hill slopes: the vista from earth to sky was practically bare, which afforded good visibility for gun fire. We were on horseback, with one led pack animal, traveling light, as hostile Sioux were reported out in force.

We were on the highlands on the west of the basin when, looking backward, I saw a dense cloud of dust rising from the prairie. It didn't look like buffalo dust to me.

"Look, Charlie," I said. "What do you make of that?"

"Injuns," he said; "plenty Injuns. Let's get back to that wallow."

The Indians were about two miles away and the terrain ahead was not favorable, so we got back to that wallow fast. We dismounted, threw and hogtied our horses and lay, as flat as possible, awaiting developments. Typical situation, you know; men in a waterhole, rifles in front of them, Indians advancing; just about the way you'd see it in that Frederic Remington picture called "The Water Hole." As a matter of fact, I described our Rosebud scrap to Remington, when I met him in the '90's, and it could very well be that he got his inspiration for the water hole picture from my account.

But on that blistering hot Montana day I wasn't thinking of inspiring anybody; only of saving my topknot. We took positions on the deepest sides of the wallow pit. I in the center, Foley on the right, Charley on the left. We had plenty of ammunition, but I advised against useless waste.

"Don't throw shots away," I said. "Wait till they come within certain range, then don't miss."

We took off our coats, rested our rifle barrels on them, and waited. For quite a while the Sioux merely circled the hilltops, shouting insults and occasionally firing a few futile shots, which fell short. They evidently realized we weren't tenderfeet but seasoned oldtimers, who were likely to sell out dearly. They went into a huddle. Suddenly three or four horsemen from both

north and east came dashing toward us, shaking their lances.

"They're thinking to draw our fire and test us out," I opined.

"Yeah," Charley answered.

"Let's wait till we're sure," I suggested.

Charley grinned, shifted the cud to the other side of his mouth. Foley was trembling all over.

The Indians apparently thought we were short of ammunition. They huddled again. Then they came forward in a body, streaming down the hill.

"This is it, boys," I said; "this time they're really coming at us! Hold your fire till they're closer."

No answer to these remarks. But I heard a curious chattering and mumbling to my right. I looked at Foley. He was shaking like a wind-tossed leaf, and the rifle in his hands was swishing from side to side like a pleased dog's tail. He was talking to his rifle. I heard him say:

"Hold still, you bastard, hold still!"

Was Foley a coward? Not so's you could notice it. All he required, as one of Kipling's characters remarked, was "to be shot over a little." Foley was there with the goods in the moment of crisis! But that moment of crisis never came.

As we rose to our knees, the whole mass of charging reds swept off sidewise in a circle, dashing back again to the hilltops. We were a bit too cool and unexcited to please them. They consulted some more.

Then one of them, a bit over-brave, swept downwards toward us with only a trio of accompanying reckless souls behind him. Having by this time gotten bored by the monotony of the thing, I rose to my knees and covered that leading brave. Although he was full 800 yards away, he whirled instantly, throwing himself alongside his horse on the side away from me and was circling back to the hills when I fired. The horse went down in a cloud of dust. The accompanying braves dashed to the bold one's rescue, catching him by one hand and one foot and retreating post haste to the hilltops. Just as they joined their fellows I heard Charley's rifle crack on my left and saw an Indian tumble limply from his horse. The next instant the hilltops were deserted; not a red in sight.

We stayed in the wallow till nightfall, then made an undisturbed getaway. We called it the battle of "Two Shot Wallow."

I've noticed this, that Indians can dish it out when odds are in their favor but can't take it worth a continental when evenly matched or over-matched. They lack the white man's guts when the going is tough. That is why I never was too much afraid of an Indian affray. I knew I had the psychological advantage. Add to that the better rifles we had, and the odds were always with us.

One adventure I had early in my running years will always remain in my memory. It could have been my closest shave. It was a trick by the plains Indians, and I'll tell you about it. This time I was with McRae's outfit, and it was twilight, and I was bored with campfire talk, and decided I'd take a walk over the hill to the east. Our horses were grazing unhobbled in a little hollow a couple of hundred yards away: we aimed to close-herd them without any staking, as we had come far that day and they were tired.

I was just returning to camp when I thought I saw some low moving objects topping a hill rise beyond the horses. I had Mac's rifle along with a good 'scope, 10-power. I crawled to another hilltop, took a look through the 'scope. I made out two objects. The first was half a dozen bucks, crawling like snakes to a vantage point that would command our camp. The other was three bucks busily engaged in lashing a big quantity of grass and dry brush on the back of a miserable pony, just the other side of the hill, out of sight of our camp. At the time I didn't understand the pony business; but I knew that the crawling bucks were up to no good. I crawled down the hill, hotfooted it to camp, told McRae what I'd seen.

He was hep to the whole game.

"That's a fire pony," he explained. "They're going to set fire to the pony's load, when it's dark enough, and drive it into our horse herd and stampede the whole bunch; then they'll pick off what they can of us. We'll fool the sonsabitches."

We had only about half an hour left to make arrangements; it would be dark that soon. We were seven. At Mac's command, six of us disposed ourselves carelessly about the camp fire, just as though we were oblivious to the presence of reds. The wrangler, a wiry little Texan named Symmes, who was wise to deals like this, just as carelessly walked up to the herd. Once hidden out of sight, he quickly double-hobbled the whole bunch (twelve) in less time than I deemed it possible.

"They'll light the pony up on the other side of that little rise, so as to keep us from seeing him," McRae explained. "They'll drive him into us horseback. Let them get him just on top where you can see him good." He turned to me and said: "Your job, Mayer, is to get that pony. Stop him

sure! Understand."

"Yes, sir."

"We'll take care of the rest. But get that pony," McRae repeated.

I crawled to the place which I figured would be closest to where the pony would be driven over the top of the hill and waited. It was less than an hour, I learned later, but that wait was like a six-month-long winter to me. At last I saw a little flicker down in the hollow. It grew brighter. Then suddenly it lashed up into a six-foot flame, and I heard a terrified squeal from the frightened beast, accompanied by yells and hoof beats. Here they came!

The flame lit up the hill rise enough for me to see that the pony would pass me within twenty feet. I wished I had not been so ambitious: twenty yards farther back would have suited me better! But I had no time for retreat. I had a double-barrelled shotgun, loaded with buckshot. I cocked both hammers. As the pony approached, I rose to my knee and gave it to him in the neck. I whirled and fired the other barrel at two of the drivers who were lined up right.

Blinded by the flash in the darkness, I could not see what execution I had done to those two bucks. I emptied my old 45 cap-and-ball revolver in the direction of some clattering hooves I heard. Then came the cracks of the outfit's rifles, so fast it seemed a hundred men were down there firing. They had waited till they could catch the retreating Indians between them and the skyline, less than a hundred yards away.

I was lying doggo with my empty guns, trying to find a hole into which to crawl and then drag it in after me. I saw someone coming toward me. I got up, grasped the shotgun by the barrels, thinking to use it as a club. Then came a welcome -- oh, such a welcome yell:

"You all right, pardner?" it said.

It was McRae!

"I'm just fine, Bob, just fine. And thank you, Bob."

We couldn't survey the battle-ground till next morning, and when we did we found three Comanches dead. We were not troubled again on that trip.

It was exciting while it lasted but, as I say, Indians are no match for white men who know their business, and no man ever knew his better than Bob McRae, "Brazos Bob," as we affectionately called him.

I think I'll just tell you about Falling Star and then we will let the Indians rest for a while and get back to the buffalo. But I must tell you about Falling Star.

He was a Brule Sioux "Medicine Man" named ah-ne-go-mika ("Falling Star" or, more literally, "He Who Makes Stars Fall.")

Next to Medicine Arrow, he was the most dangerous Indian in his part of the world. His stunt was magic, by whose aid, so he claimed, he was able to catch, harmlessly, in his mouth any white man's bullets fired at him. For a -- as usual -- "small" compensation, say, five ponies, he would sell his charms to any warrior who wished to be immune in his fights with the damned buffalo runners. His customers were many. And you can imagine how dangerously great his influence was over his red brothers. Colonel Dodge was so apprehensive about his ultimately getting up a general uprising among all the plains tribes, that he once told me he would "pay munificently" (his very words) for Star's scalp.

It was this cute old devil's grandstand play to get up on a high hill, somewhere out of range, slap his thighs derisively toward the entrenched whites. Some hot head was always sure to waste a shell on him. When the gun cracked Falling Star would jump into the air, open his mouth, and, when he hit ground again, he would with much ceremony spit the bullet out into his open hand and pass it around for the admiring dupes. The bullet, of course, was in his mouth the whole time; generally all of considerable size.

Well, one day the magic failed him when a 550 grain Sharps slug took him just above the navel at a range he deemed impossible. You see, he had never before exposed himself to any but short-range guns, like the Spencer carbine. He bit off more bullet than he could chew.

When I went up to him, I saw that he had the smallest, longest, slimmest fingers I ever saw on a human being of his size. He was fat as a hog, weighing, I should judge, around 250 pounds. The 550 grain bullet took out three of his vertebra with it, the hole in his back being big enough



WE KILL THE GOLDEN GOOSE

One Sunday morning when I was in camp cutting my own hair, a man rode up on a buckskin gelding. He was typical of his day, tall, slender, grim and determined in visage; he had about him what is called "the look of eagles." I recognized him: he was Charley Jones, from around Garden City. Jones had been a successful runner for several seasons. Then he got disgusted with the slaughter, wrapped his Sharps rifle around one of the wheels of his wagon, and vowed he'd never again set a trigger on a buffer. And he never did.

"Mayer," he began after the usual amenities and a stiff drink of corn whiskey, "Mayer, you and the other runners are a passel of dam'fools the way you are wiping out the buffalo. Don't you realize that in just a few years there won't be a dam' buff left in the world?"

I pooh-poohed at this kind of talk.

"Jones, you're clear off on the wrong side of the horse," I told him. "Why, there are as many buffalo now as there ever were. There are hundreds of millions of them."

"Are you getting as many as you used to?"

"Well, no. But that's my fault. I am hunting in the wrong place."

"Where's the right place?" Jones persisted.

"Damned if I know, but we are about to take off and find it tomorrow," I told him.

"You'll never find it," said he. "Because it just don't exist any longer. Unless we're mighty careful there won't even be a specimen to keep in a zoo."

And with that he rode away. I thought, of course, he was loco, and told my boys about it. We did have a deep conference that day, though, and decided that there were, indeed, fewer buffalo than there used to be, but still plenty to keep us going until we were old men whose hands shook so badly they couldn't hold a rifle steady enough to hit one.

But this fellow Jones. He was in earnest about fearing the destruction of the buffalo. He couldn't make any of us runners do more about his pronouncements than laugh at them, but it didn't deter him. When he saw, as he did in a very few months, that the complete obliteration of the buffalo was imminent, what did he do but catch, with his own rope and hands, seven, I think it was, buffalo calves, which he took to his ranch and hand-raised. And these little calves were all that was left of the millions of buffalo when we runners got through with them; and they constitute the breeding-stock from which every buffalo in the world comes. Because of his deed, Jones became known as Buffalo Jones, and will go down in history as an important, if minor, personality of the frontier of the West. He was smarter than the rest of us. I admit it now. I wouldn't admit it on that Sunday in camp.

But I soon found out how wrong I was.

I found it out every day when I went out scouting for something to shoot. A couple of years before it was nothing to see 5,000, 10,000 buff in a day's ride. Now if I saw 50 I was lucky. Presently all I saw was rotting red carcasses or bleaching white bones. We had killed the golden goose.

During my runner's years I, quite naturally, wasn't interested in overall figures on total number killed, shipped, and so forth. I was a runner, not a statistician. But if I'd had sense enough in those days I could have realized in a few minutes' time that the game was on the way out. I couldn't have done anything about it, but I could have foreseen that my future was rather dim as a buffalo runner.

Completely accurate figures will likely never be compiled, but here are some authentic ones from the Southwest Historical Society which will show how thoroughly we killed the golden goose.

Dodge City, Kansas, was known as the buffalo city, and more hides were shipped from there than from anywhere else. The shipments started in earnest in 1871, but figures for that year are missing. During the winter of 1872-1873, one firm alone out of Dodge City shipped 200,000 hides. During the same year the same firm handled 1,617,000 pounds of buffalo meat, and \$2,500,000 worth of buffalo bones. Now, that was big business in a small frontier town; and remember Dodge, although largest handler of buffalo hides and meat, was only one of a dozen cities that were on rails and shipping buffalo.

But notice how swiftly the traffic dropped. The buffalo years were only seven, 1871 to 1878. The last big shipment was in 1878. It consisted of 40,000 hides, only a fifth of the number handled by the same firm from the same railhead seven years before. After that there weren't enough buffalo left to make handling profitable, so agents shut up their offices and got into some other racket, usually cattle, for fast on the heels of the buffalo came the cattle drives. Again Dodge assumed importance, took on a leading role.

Here are some other figures confirming the Dodge City figure I just cited.

In 1872, figures show that 1,491,489 buffalo were killed. In 1873, the high year, the figure

given is 1,508,568. Now note this: in 1874, the total is only 158,583 -- the buffalo was decimated in just one year. Tragic picture, don't you think?

If you want to add the total killed during those three years you will see it comes to 3,158,730. But the Indians was getting his share, too, and Indian kills are set down by men who study records carefully enough to be listened to and believed, at 405,000 a year, or 1,215,000 in the three-year period.

Add the Indian crop to the white runners' crop and you will have a total kill for years 1872, 1873, and 1874 of 4,373,730 animals; in three years' time. No one can say how many were killed during the seven-year period the buffalo harvest lasted, but it must have been well over five million and might even have been close to six. Who knows?

I once, some years ago, sought a definite answer to that question by consulting railroads, because all the buffalo shipped from the ranges went by rail, and I figured if anyone would have the correct answer it would be the roads themselves. Everywhere I went I got the rather naive answer that the railroads couldn't answer my question, because they kept no records! Since when did railroads stop keeping records?

The Santa Fe got the lion's share of the business, and about a third of the hides went out over the Santa Fe. But the Santa Fe didn't keep records either, I was told!

What happens whenever the law of diminishing returns sets to work, increased efficiency, happened on the buffalo ranges. I know when I started in we were wasteful. We shot only cows. Their fur was softer; their skins were thinner; they were more in demand. If we killed a bull or two and we killed more than one or two just for the devil of it, we didn't bother to skin him; just left him lay for the wolves and coyotes to come along and do our job for us. Later on, we were glad to kill bulls, calves, anything.

We were wasteful of hides, too, and I have figures showing how we got over that and increased our efficiency in handling. In 1872, for instance, every hide that reached market represented three or four buffalo killed. The others were wasted by improper handling, rotting on the ground, and similar shiftlessnesses. The next year we began to tighten up a little: for every hide reaching railhead two buffalo gave their only lives. And in 1874, each hide represented the death of one and a-fourth buffalo. Yes, we became efficient, economical when we had nothing to be efficient or economical about. Our efficiency came too late. We learned our profession, but had no chance to practice it, which is always a tragedy.

One by one we runners put up our buffalo rifles, sold them, gave them away, or kept them for other hunting, and left the ranges. And there settled over them a vast quiet, punctuated at night by the snarls and howls of prairie wolves as they prowled through the carrion and found living very good. Not a living thing, aside from these wolves and coyotes stirred.

The buffalo was gone.

AFTERMATH

It was as if by prearrangement or signal the way the runners left the ranges, once the buffalo days were done. Hardly waiting to say goodbye, they hitched up, headed for the most part eastward to other careers. Many stayed, however, took up 160-acre homesteads on the very ground where they had run buffalo, and became staid and solid citizens. Some went back to the cities whence they came, their lust for adventure surfeited.

I was luckier than most: I had a girl waiting for me in Denver, whom I married, and a career waiting for me in Colorado, which I immediately followed. The training I had had on the buffalo ranges came to help me in my new endeavor. I became a market hunter for the Leadville market. Leadville started in earnest to boom in 1879 and there was no cattle industry to feed the hungry miners. I became the town's meat industry, and thousands of pounds of deer, elk, mountain sheep, and antelope I brought in in my wagons. Here I was more successful financially than on the buff. But that, as Mr. Kipling was wont to say, is another story. And I am not quite through with the story of the buffalo.

Millions of pounds of buffalo meat, carrion now, was piled up on the ranges, and the stench was so great that at a mile away from a stand you could smell it and be forced to hold your nose. Only the coyotes and wolves didn't seem to mind. To them it was a field day, all the rotten meat you wanted to eat without the necessity of hunting it and running it down. What could be finer, from a coyote's point view? And no danger from man either, because no men were around. That

is not for a while.

But presently the ranges which had rung with the boom, boom, boom of the heavy buffalo rifles and the beats of millions of buffalo hooves, soon heard another sound. It was the hoofbeats of the horses which brought the next wave of invaders to the buffalo ranges.

These were the wolfers.

They didn't mind the stench either, or they got used to it, as they plied their nefarious trade, of poisoning the coyotes and wolves that came to the buffalo carcasses to feast. They would poison methodically every carcass in a radius of two or three miles; as much as they could conveniently handle. They used strychnine, and the poor beasts, not used to man or his ways, would eat, would die in great agony. But the wolver didn't care how they died, just so long as he got their hides, worth a dollar or two at the time. Several hundred men eked out a living being wolfers, but they were a mean, ugly, cheap breed of drunkards mostly, and they didn't add to the beauty of the buffalo ranges any more than we did when we scattered the corpses of the buffalo where we did.

Then another grotesque wave of men came on the heels of the wolfers, men about as ugly and mean as the wolfers themselves. They were the boners. They picked up the bones, shipped them east, where they were ground up and used, for the most part, in the process of refining sugar, although many, of course, were used for fertilizer.

A year after the Santa Fe reached Dodge City, a strange old man appeared with a two-horse team.

"What's your business?" someone asked him.

"Buffalo bones," he said, that and no more, as he headed his team toward the buffalo range.

Everybody laughed at him. They dubbed him "Buffalo Bones," and laughed every time they saw him, strangely hunched up on the high seat of his wagon, the box of which glistened with the sundried bones of the buffalo. He was a worker, that old fellow, and presently he was hiring other teamsters to help him with this -- the last-phase of the buffalo harvest. All told he shipped 3,000 carloads of bones -- and on them made a very tidy fortune, and laughed last at those who had had so much fun laughing at him.

After that civilization moved in fast. Buffalo grass was plowed under, and wheat, and oats, and barley, and corn, and sod houses, and school houses, and grange halls began appearing where once buffalo roamed at will. Now when you visit the old range, you will be lucky if you find any evidence whatsoever of the life I have been describing for you. If you can find some ground which hasn't been plowed, however, you will here and there notice some declivities of varying size and depth. These will be buffalo wallows, where buffalo used to twist and turn and dig out deep places with their tall humps, as they sought to drive off flies or get the satisfaction which only a buffalo could understand. And going toward the streams, in some of these unsullied fields, you will find dim but deep paths. These are the buffalo trails, and if your imagination is working try to picture these tall, stately, dignified, but still stupid animals, going methodically to the stream to quench their thirst.

It's fair to ask if the slaughter was justified or if it could have been otherwise? I don't think it could have been. I think the slaughter of the buffalo would be what moderns would call an historical necessity. It just had to come.

You see, the buffalo had almost no power of adjustment. He was what he was, and he couldn't change to suit his environment, so when the environment changed, he was absolutely unable to meet change. So he had to perish. A good many men tried to make the buffalo of some earthly use to civilization. Buffalo Jones, for example, spent thousands of dollars crossing buffalo with domestic cattle, producing a breed he called catalo. But, alas, the catalo was a failure from the start. He couldn't be herded, he couldn't be domesticated, he could not be trusted, and his meat was coarse and stringy. It has been years since I have heard of anyone trying to make something of the buffalo. So behold him today, a curiosity behind a high wire fence in the zoo and multiplying so rapidly that if you want one you can get him virtually for nothing.

Maybe we runners served our purpose in helping abolish the buffalo; maybe it was our ruthless harvesting of him which telescoped the control of the Indian by a decade or maybe more. Or maybe I am just rationalizing. Maybe we were just a greedy lot who wanted to get ours, and to hell with posterity, the buffalo, and anyone else, just so we kept our scalps on and our money pouches filled. I think maybe that is the way it was.

OUT OF IT FOR GOOD

I wasn't sorry when I headed my wagons westward toward the Rockies and what I was sure would be the good life it promised to be. I didn't have my million, but I still had youth, and strength, and ambition, and experience by now, so I thought I could cope with almost any situation. And I was going home to a girl who had decided she wanted me for her husband. And I was singing when my wagons left Dodge for Denver. It was a wonderful feeling, one I read in Joseph Conrad years later described as "that silly, beautiful, charming youth," and so it was.

My plans went according to Hoyle. I married. I went into market hunting, and here I got hold of some of the dollars that eluded me in the buffalo business. The fact is that, hunting deer, antelope, elk, mountain sheep, and bear for the mining camp markets of Colorado, I earned more, in 1880, than during any two years on the buffalo ranges. And the work was three or four times as easy and pleasant. For one thing I got better prices for the meat I delivered to the camps than I ever got from buffalo. Game was plentiful. When I wasn't hunting I was guiding sportsmen, and I liked that.

But the lure of the buffalo still held me, and now and then I'd sashay back to the ranges for a little go at the buffalo again. This time it was mostly as an enterpriser. I hired others to do the hunting and gathering of bones. Yes, I was a bone man for a year. I furnished wagons, grub, teams, and the like but no rifles or ammunition or strong backs, which were required to life heavy buffalo skeletons and load them into wagons that were taller than the tallest man. I paid 50 per cent commission, and made a few thousand dollars of what to me was easy money after what I'd been through on the range.

For the sake of the record, I want to show you how little I had when I got out of the business. My wagons and outfit were paid for, I had a couple of thousand dollars in the bank, but that is all. But I was surcharged with memories that have gone with me during the whole of my long life; memories that I wouldn't swap now for the big house, the stovepipe hat, and a seat in Congress, as if I had ever yearned for one of those. I was one of the lucky ones. And on top of all that, two friendships with two of the grandest individuals I ever knew -- McRae and Vimy. It was my grace to maintain close friendship with these two men for many years after our active association together. Both were long-lived. They died within a few months of each other, which is the way both wanted it. They were the Damon and Phythias of the frontier, and the three of us must have been the three musketeers.

There was one more chapter in my life as a buffalo runner, however. My last buffalo. There had to be a first, and there had to be a last. I have already told you about my first, how I shot a tough old bull and thus contracted buffalo fever. Well, my last victim was likewise a tough old bull. It was up on the Musselshell in Wyoming. I was up there hunting elk when I topped a draw and saw him, strayed from the herd. He was a pitiful object, old, decrepit, and sick. Already coyotes were around him, licking their chops in anticipation of the feed which would come, once he dropped, which he was sure to do very shortly. I saved him the trouble. I set the trigger on my old 40-90, aimed at his neck. It was just like old times, to have a buffalo in the stadia hairs, and maybe my heart leaped a little bit. I touched the delicate trigger, and the gun roared. He fell. He never knew what struck him.

Nearby was a herd of twelve fine cows, all of which I could have easily killed. But I didn't even shoot one. My buffalo days were over. I had harvested the last of the crop.

