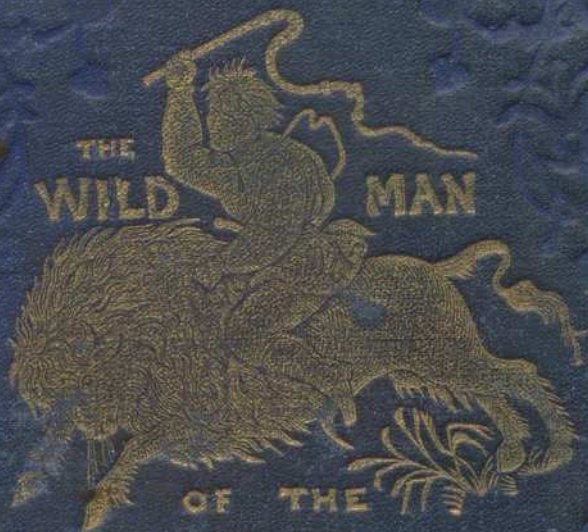


THE
WILD MAN



OF THE
WEST.

Illustrated.



THE
WILD MAN OF THE WEST.

A Tale of the Rocky Mountains.

BY

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A New Edition,

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZWECKER.

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CHAPTER VII.

A wolfish Way of killing Buffalo described—Bounce becomes
Metaphysical on the Fine Arts—Butchering enlarged on
—A glorious Feast, and Sketching under Difficulties.

ONE of the ancient poets has said that wandering through the wild woods is a pleasant thing. At least, if one of them has not said that, he ought to have said it, and, certainly, many of them must have thought it, whether they said it or no. Undoubtedly, if future historians record faithfully all that has been said and written from the commencement of time to the period in which they flourish, they will embalm the fact that at least one prose writer of the present day has enunciated that incontrovertible proposition.

But we go a step farther. We assert positively that wandering through the wild woods is a healthy as well as a pleasant sort of thing. The free air of the mountains and prairies is renovating, the perfumes of the forests are salubrious; while the constantly recurring necessity for leaping and scrambling is good for the muscles, and the occasional tripping over roots, tumbling into holes, scratching one's face and banging one's shins and toes against stumps, is good for—though somewhat trying to—the temper.

Further still—we affirm that wandering through the wild woods is a funny thing. Any one who had observed our friends March Marston, and Redhand, and Bounce, and Big Waller, and Black Gibault, the trappers, and Bertram the artist, and Hawkswing the Indian, one beautiful afternoon, not long after the day on which they lost their canoe, would have admitted, without hesitation, that wandering through the wild woods was, among other things, a funny thing.

On the beautiful afternoon referred to, the first six individuals above named were huddled together in a promiscuous heap, behind a small bush, in such a confused way that an ignorant spectator might have supposed that Bounce's head belonged to Big Waller's body, and the artist's shoulders to Redhand's head, and their respective legs and arms to no one individually, but to all collectively in a miscellaneous sort of way. The fact was that the bush behind which they were huddled was almost too small to conceal them all, and, being a solitary bush in the midst of a little plain of about a half a mile in extent, they had to make the most of it and the least of themselves. It would have been a refreshing sight for a moralist to have witnessed this instance of man—whose natural tendency is to try to look big—thus voluntarily endeavouring to look as small as possible!

This bundle of humanity was staring through the bush, with, as the saying is, all its eyes, that

is, with six pairs of—or twelve individual—eyes; and they were staring at a wolf—an enormous wolf—that was slowly walking away from the bush behind which they were ensconced! It was a very singular wolf indeed—one that was well calculated to excite surprise in the breast even of trappers. There was something radically wrong with that wolf, especially about the legs. Its ears and head were all right, and it had a tail, a very good tail for a wolf; but there was a strange unaccountable lump under its neck, and its fore legs bent the wrong way at the knees, and it seemed to have long feet trailing behind its hind legs, besides being otherwise misshapen. The mystery is explained when we state that this wolf was none other than Hawkswing, down on his hands and knees, with a wolf-skin over his back, and Bertram's blunderbuss-pistol in his hand. He was creeping cautiously towards a herd of six or seven buffaloes that chanced to be feeding quietly there, quite unconscious of the near proximity of so dangerous an enemy.

"I hope the old pistol won't miss fire," whispered Redhand, as he observed that the wolf paused, evidently for the purpose of examining the priming.

"I hope," added Bounce, "that the Injun won't miss his aim. He be'nt used to pistols."

"Never fear," said March, with a quiet grin. "If he aims within a yard o' the brute he's sure

to hit, for I loaded the old blunderbuss myself, an' it's crammed nigh to the muzzle with all sorts o' things, includin' stones."

At this Big Waller stared, and said, emphatically, "It'll bust!" Bertram felt and looked uneasy, but Bounce shook his head.

"Them old things," said he, "never bust. I've been forty years, off an' on, in these parts, an' I've always obsarved that old irons o' that sort *don't* bust; cause why? they'd ha' busted w'en they wos new, if they'd bin goin' to bust at all. The fact is they *can't* bust. They're too useless even for that."

"How comes it," inquired Bertram, "that the buffaloes are not afraid of a wolf? I have been led to understand that wolves are the inveterate enemies of buffaloes, and that they often attack them."

To this question March, whose head was in close proximity to that of the artist, replied—

"Ay, the sneakin' brutes will attack a single wounded or worn-out old buffalo, when it falls behind the herd, and when there are lots o' their low-minded comrades along with 'em; but the buffaloes don't care a straw for a single wolf, as ye may see now if ye pay attention to what Hawks wing's doin'."

Bertram became silent on observing that Indian had approached to within about pist^t range of the buffalo without attracting particu.

attention, and that he was in the act of taking aim at its shoulder. Immediately a sharp click caused the buffalo to look up and apprised the on-lookers that the faithless weapon had missed fire; again Hawkswing pulled the trigger and with a like result. By this time the buffalo, having become alarmed, started off at a run. Once more the click was heard; then the wolf, rising on its hind legs, coolly walked back to its comrades behind the bush, while the herd of buffaloes, galloped furiously away.

The Indian solemnly stalked up to Bertram and presented the pistol to him with such an expression of grave contempt on his countenance that March Marston burst into an irresistible fit of laughter; thereby relieving his own feelings and giving, as it were, direction to those of the others, most of whom were in the unpleasant condition of being undecided whether to laugh or cry.

To miss a buffalo was not indeed a new, or in ordinary circumstances, a severe misfortune; but to miss one after having been three days without food, with the exception of a little unpalatable wolf's flesh, was not an agreeable, much less an amusing, incident.

"I'll tell ye wot it is," said Bounce, slapping his thigh violently and emphasizing his words as if to imply that nobody had ever told anybody "wot" anything "wos" since the world began

up to that time, "I'll tell ye wot it is, I won't stand this sort o' thing no longer."

"It is most unfortunate," sighed poor Bertram, who thoroughly identified himself with his pistol, and felt as much ashamed of it as if the fault had been his own.

"Wall, lads," observed Big Waller, drawing forth his pipe as the only source of comfort in these trying circumstances, and filling it with scrupulous care, "it ain't of no use gettin' growowly about it, I guess. There air more buf-faloes then them wot's gone; mayhap we'll splifficate one before we gits more waspisher."

It may, perhaps, be necessary to explain that Waller's last word referred to the unusually small waists of the party, the result of a pretty long fast.

"I'll tell ye what it is," said March, advancing towards Bounce with a swagger and drawing his hunting-knife, "I quite agree with Waller's sentiments. I don't mean to allow myself to get any more waspisher, so I vote that we cut Bounce up and have a feed. What say you, comrades?"

"All right," replied Bounce, laying bare his broad chest as if to receive the knife, "only, p'raps, ye'll allow me to eat the first slice off myself afore ye begin, cause I couldn't well have my share afterwards, d'ye see? But, now I think on't, I'd be rather a tough morsel. Young meat's

gin'rally thought the tenderest. Wot say ye to cuttin' up March first, an' tryin' me nixt?"

"If you'll only wait, lads," said Redhand, "till Mr. Bertram gits a new flint into his pistol, we'll shoot the victim instead o' cuttin' him up. It'll be quicker, you know."

"Hah! non," cried Gibault, leaping a few inches off the ground, under the impulse of a new idea, "I vill show to you vat ve vill do. Ve vill each cot hoff von finger. Redhand, he vill begin vid de thomb, et so on till it come to me, and I vill cot hoff mine leet finger. Each vill devour the finger of de oder, an' so ve shall have von dinner vidout committing mordor—ha! vat say you?"

As Bertram had by this time arranged the lock of his pistol and reprimed it, the hungry travellers resumed their weary march without coming to a decision upon this delicate point.

It had happened that, during the last few days, the land over which they travelled being somewhat barren, small game had become scarce, and the large game could not be approached near enough to be shot with such weapons as the artist's antiquated pistols; and as the party possessed nothing better in the shape of a projectile they had failed to procure supplies. They had now, however, again reached a rich country, and had succeeded in trapping a large wolf, under the

skin of which Hawkswing had made, as we have seen, an unsuccessful effort to shoot a buffalo. Soon after this failure the party came to a ridge of gravelly soil that stretched across the plain like a wave.

The plain, or small prairie, to which we refer was in the midst of a most lovely scene. The earth was carpeted with rich green grass, in which the wild flowers nestled like gems. The ground was undulating, yet so varied in its formations that the waves and mounds did not prevent the eyes of the travellers ranging over a vast tract of country, even when they were down among the hollows; and, when they had ascended the backs of the ridges, they could cast a wide glance over a scene of mingled plain and wood, lake and river, such as is never seen except in earth's remotest wilds, where man has not attempted to adorn the face of Nature with the exuberances of his own wonderful invention.

Far away on the horizon the jagged forms and snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains rose clear and sharp against the sky. For some days past the trappers had sighted this stupendous "backbone" of the far west, yet so slowly did they draw near that March Marston and Bertram, in their impatience, almost believed they were a range of phantom hills, which ever receded from them as they advanced.

On reaching the summit of the gravelly ridge,

Redhand looked along it with an earnest, searching gaze.

"Wot's ado now?" inquired Bounce.

"There ought to be prairie-hens here," replied the other.

"Oh! do stand still, just as you are, men," cried Bertram, enthusiastically, flopping down on a stone and drawing forth his sketch-book, "you'll make such a capital foreground."

The trappers smiled and took out their pipes, having now learned from experience that smoking was not detrimental to a sketch—rather the reverse.

"Cut away, Gibault," said Bounce, "an' take a look at the edge o' yon bluff o' poplars and willows. I've obsarved that prairie-hens is fond o' sich places. You'll not be missed out o' the pictur', bein' only a small object, d'ye see, besides an ogly one."

The jovial Canadian acknowledged the compliment with a smile and obeyed the command, leaving his companions to smoke their pipes and gaze with quiet complacency upon the magnificent scene. Doubtless, much of their satisfaction resulted from the soothing influence of tobacco on their empty stomachs.

"I say," whispered Waller, removing his pipe and puffing from his lips a large cloud of smoke, which rolled upwards in the form of a white ring, "I say, Bounce, I guess it's past my comprehen-

sion what he means by a foreground. How does *we* make a capital foreground?"

Bounce looked at his companion in silence for a few seconds; then he removed his pipe, pursed his lips, frowned heavily, looked at the ground, and repeated slowly, "How does *we* make a capital foreground?"

Waller nodded.

"Ay, that's it." Bounce resumed his pipe for a few seconds, and then said with an air of the utmost profundity,—

"Don't you know?"

"No, I don't."

"Wot? Nothin' about it wotiver?"

"Nothin' wotsomediver."

"Hm, that's okard," said Bounce, once more applying to his pipe; "'cause, d'ye see, its most 'orrible difficult to explain a thing to a feller as don't know nothin' wotiver about it. If ye only had the smallest guess o' ——"

"Wall, come, I does know *somehin'* about it," interrupted Waller.

"Wot's that?" inquired Bounce, brightening up.

"I calc'late that I knows for certain it ain't got no place wotever in my onderstandin'."

"Hah!" exclaimed Bounce. "Come, then, I'll do my best for to explain it t'ye. Here's wot it is. D'ye see Mr. Bertram, there?"

"Yes I does."

"An' d'ye see yerself?"

"Wall, I does," replied Waller, looking complacently down at his huge limbs.

"Good; then d'ye see the ground over there?" continued Bounce, pointing with his pipe to the Rocky Mountains.

Waller nodded.

"Now then," said Bounce, in those deep earnest tones with which men usually attempt to probe the marrow of some desperately knotty question; "Now, then, when Mr. Bertram's a drawin' of, an' tries to look at the ground over there, you an' me comes *before* the ground, d'ye see; an' so we're, as ye may say, *before-grounds*. But men wot studies human natur' an' langwidges, d'ye see, comes for to know that words is always gittin' onnecessary bits chopped off 'em—sometimes at one end, sometimes at t'other. So they tuck off the B, d'ye see, an' made it foreground, and that's how we come to be foregrounds."

"Oh!" said Waller, with the vacant air of a man who feels himself as wise at the termination as he was at the beginning of an explanation.

"Yes," resumed Bounce, "that's how it is. I must confess, for my part, that I don't 'xactly see the advantage o' us in that light. I should ha' thought it would ha' bin better to make us stand to one side, d'ye see, and let him see how the land lies. But there's no accountin' for

taste in this wurld—I've obsarved that, iver since I was three fut two."

Having delivered himself of this graphic exposition of an abstruse subject, Bounce relapsed into silence, and the whole party continued for some minutes in a profound reverie. From this felicitous condition they were awakened by the sudden appearance of Black Gibault, who darted out of the poplar bluff and made towards them at the top of his speed. He uttered no cry, but, on coming near enough to permit of his features being clearly seen, it was observed that his eyes were eagerly wide open, and that his mouth was engaged in the formation of words. A second or two more, and he was near enough to be heard uttering the word "buffaloes" in a hoarse whisper.

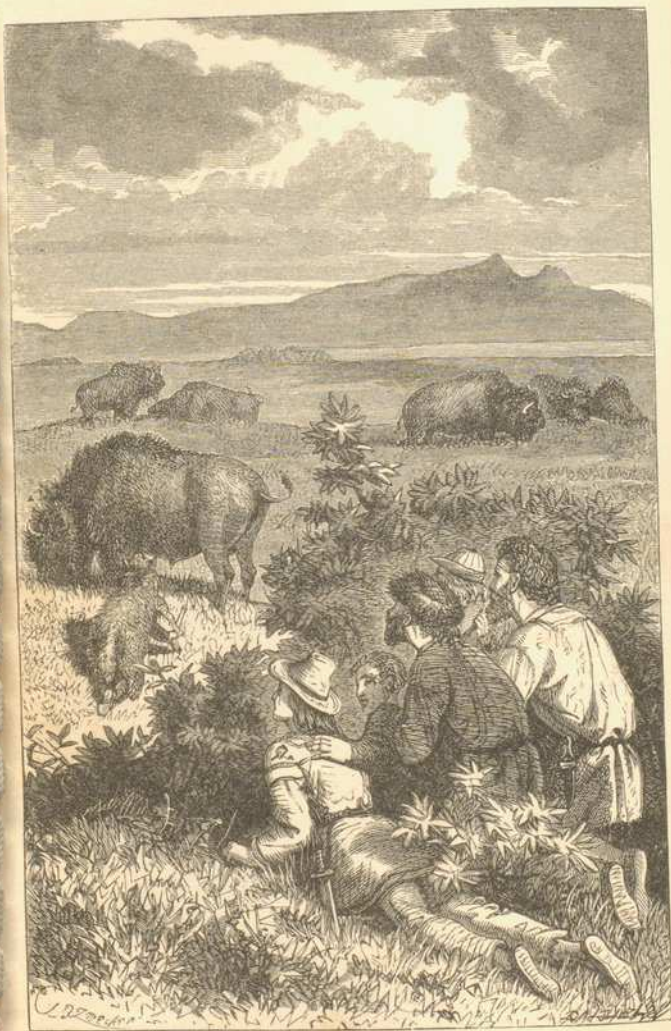
"Ho! boy, wot is't?" cried Bounce, in an equally hoarse whisper.

"Ba—buffaloes, hah! buffaloes," cried Gibault, panting violently as he came up; "Where be de leet gun? Ho! Monsieur Bertram, out vid it."

"Where saw ye them?" asked Redhand, seizing the two pistols, and examining the priming.

"Jist oder side of de bluff. Ver' ciose to de bushes. Queek! queek! vite! mon garçon, you is so drefful slow."

The latter part of this sentence was addressed to Hawkswing, who was quietly putting on his wolf-skin. Although too slow for the hasty spirit



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of Gibault, the Indian was quick enough for all useful purposes. In three minutes he was in the clump of poplar trees behind which the buffaloes were reported to be feeding, and in another minute he was out upon the plain creeping towards his victims, while the rest of the party were again huddled together behind a bush, looking on with deep interest and breathless attention.

Gradually and slowly the Indian crept towards the buffaloes, pausing and snuffing about from time to time as if he were a veritable wolf in search of something to eat. At last he had approached near enough to the herd to attract their attention, but scarcely near enough to make sure of bringing one down. The huge unwieldy creatures looked up inquiringly for a moment, but, seeing only a solitary enemy, they scorned to take further notice of him, and went on feeding.

Hawkswing paused within a few yards of the side of a fat sleek animal, and slowly raised his pistol. The trappers held their breath, and Bertram uttered a low groan of anxiety. One moment more and a white puff was followed by a loud crack, and a bellow, as the horror-stricken buffaloes tossed up their heels and fled wildly from the spot, leaving one of their number in the agonies of death upon the plain.

The knife of the Indian hastened its end, and

with a rush and a yell of delight the whole party fell upon the luckless animal.

It was a wonderful sight to see, the way in which these experienced men flayed and cut up that buffalo! Hawkswing, without taking time to remove his wolf-skin covering, commenced upon the head and speedily cut out the tongue—a more difficult operation than inexperienced persons would suppose. Redhand and Bounce began at the shoulders, and Big Waller and Gibault fell to work upon the flanks. March Marston seized his axe, and hastening into the bluff felled a dead pine and kindled a fire. As for Bertram, he sat down to sketch the whole with a degree of prompt facility and gusto, that showed the habit had become second nature to him.

The way in which these men wielded their bloody knives, flayed and sliced, dismembered and divided that buffalo, is past belief—almost beyond description. Each man threw off his capote and tucked up his shirt-sleeves to the elbows, and very soon each had on a pair of bright red gauntlets. And the bloody appearance of Hawkswing's mouth proved that he had been anticipating the feast with a few tit-bits raw. The others were more patient.

In very nearly as short a time as it takes to tell, the buffalo was converted into a mass of fragments that were powerfully suggestive of a butcher's shop, and the trappers adjourned to a

neighbouring rivulet to wash their hands and arms.

"Now, I'll tell ye wot it is," observed Bounce, while thus engaged; "I means for to have a most awful blow out, and then go to sleep for four-and-twenty hours on end."

"Ditto," remarked Big Waller with a nod; to which old Redhand replied with a chuckle.

"An' who be go to vatch, tink you?" inquired Gibault, as they all returned to the camp. "Prehaps de Injuns look out for us—vat den?"

"Ah ve may well ask that, Gibault," said Redhand; "the fact is I've been thinkin' that now we're drawin' near to enemies we must begin to keep better watch at night, and to burn small fires o' dry wood, lest the smoke should tell a tale upon us."

"Oh, don't talk bam, old feller," said Waller; "I guess we'll have watchin' enough w'en we gits into the mountains. Let's take it easy here."

"We'll have one good blow out to-night, anyhow," cried March Marston, heaving a fresh pile of logs on the already roaring fire. "Now, Mr. Bertram, *do* give up your scratchin' to-night, and let's see what you can do in the eatin' way. I'm sure you've fasted long enough, at least for the good o' your health."

The poor artist had indeed fasted long enough to give to his naturally thin and lank figure a thread-papery appearance that might have sug-

gested the idea that he was evaporating. He smiled good-humouredly when March Marston, who had now become rather familiar with him, shut up his sketch-book and set him forcibly down before the fire, all round which steaks and hunks of meat were roasting and grilling, and sending forth an odour that would have rendered less hungry men impatient of delay. But they had not to wait long. Each man sat before his respective steak or hunk, gazing eagerly, as, skewered on the end of a splinter of wood, his supper roasted hissingly. When the side next the fire was partially cooked, he turned it round and fell to work upon that while the other side was roasting—thus the cooking and the eating went on together.

After a considerable time symptoms of satiety began to appear, in the shape of an occasional remark. Soon Bounce uttered a deep sigh, and announced his belief that, having taken the edge off his appetite, it was time to begin with the marrow-bones. Thereupon, with the marrow-bones he began, and his example was quickly followed by his companions. There was a business-like steadiness of purpose in the way in which that meal was eaten, and in the whole of the procedure connected with it, that would have been highly diverting to a disinterested spectator.

When the feast was concluded, the pipes made

their appearance as a matter of course; and when these were lighted, and in full blast, the trappers found leisure to look round upon each other's faces with expressions of benignity.

"Dat be a monstrobolly goot supper," remarked Gibault Noir. Gibault spoke with an effort. It was quite plain that moderation was a virtue that he did not possess in a high degree—at least, not on the present occasion.

"You'll need a 'monstrobolly' good sleep arter it," observed Bounce, quietly.

"You will, jist," said Waller; "an' so will this coon, I cal——"

Big Waller was going to have "calculated," according to custom; but sleepiness overpowered him at the moment, and he terminated the word with a yawn of such ferocity that it drew from Redhand a remark of doubt as to whether his jaws could stand such treatment long.

Every member of that party seemed to be quite contented and amiable, but no one showed much inclination to talk, and ere many minutes had passed, half their number were under their blankets, their heads pillowed on their bundles and their eyes sealed in sleep. A few minutes later, and Big Waller, sinking into a very sprawling and reckless posture, with his back against the stem of a large cotton-tree, dropped into a state of slumber with his pipe hanging gracefully from his lips.

This seemed so picturesque to Theodore Bertram, who sat immediately opposite to the Yankee, on the other side of the fire, that he pulled out his sketch-book and began enthusiastically to sketch by the flickering light. While he was thus occupied, the others lay down, one by one, and he was left, at last, the only waking member of the camp.

But Theodore Bertram was human, and this is tantamount to saying that he was not capable of ignoring the somnolent influences of human nature. To his own extreme surprise his head fell forward with an abrupt nod while he was engaged in the act of depicting Big Waller's nose, and he found, on resuming work with an imbecile smile at what he deemed his weakness, that that member of the Yankee's face was at least two feet long, and was formed after the pattern of a somewhat irregular Bologna sausage. India-rubber quickly put this to rights, however, and he set to again with renewed zeal. Throwing back his head, and looking up as if for inspiration, his wide-awake fell off, and it required a sudden and powerful effort to prevent his head and shoulders falling in the same direction.

Having replaced his hat and shaken himself a little, the persevering man once more applied himself to his task of finishing the Yankee's portrait, which, to say truth, now presented a variety of jagged and picturesque outlines, that savoured

more of caricature than anything Bertram had ever yet accomplished. For some time the pencil moved upon the paper pretty steadily, and the artist was beginning to congratulate himself on his success, when, to his horror, he observed that the tree against which the Yankee leaned was in the act of falling over to the right. The same instant he received a shock upon the left side, and awoke to find that he had fallen heavily upon poor Gibault's breast, and that Waller and his tree were *in statu quo*. But Gibault cared not; he was too deeply intent upon sleeping to mind such trifles.

Bertram smiled meekly as he resumed his sitting posture; but the smile faded and was replaced by a gaze of mute astonishment as he observed that he had depicted Waller's right eye upon his chin, close beneath his nose! There seemed to be some sort of magic here, and he felt disposed to regard the thing in the light of some serious optical illusion, when, on closer inspection, he discovered Waller's mouth drawn altogether beyond the circle of his countenance, a foot or so above his head, on the stem of the tree against which he leaned. This changed the current of his thoughts and led him to believe that he must be dreaming, under which impression he fell back and went to sleep.

Of course, Bertram recollected nothing after that; but when Gibault awoke next morning, he

found him lying on his back, with his feet in the ashes of the extinct fire, his tall brigandish wide-awake perfectly flat beneath his shoulders, and his sketch-book lying open across his face.