

## CHAPTER IX.

## CHAMPION BUFFALO KILLER.



RETTY soon after the adventures mentioned in the preceding chapter, I had my celebrated buffalo hunt with Billy Comstock, a noted scout, guide and interpreter, who was then chief of scouts at Fort Wallace, Kansas. Comstock had the reputation, for a long time, of being a most successful buffalo hunter, and the officers in particular, who had seen him kill buffaloes, were very desirous of backing him in a match against me. It was accordingly arranged that I should shoot him a buffalo-killing match, and the preliminaries were easily and satisfactorily agreed upon. We were to hunt one day of eight hours, beginning at eight o'clock in the morning, and closing at four o'clock in the afternoon. The

wager was five hundred dollars a side, and the man who should kill the greater number of buffaloes from on horseback was to be declared the winner.

The hunt took place about twenty miles east of Sheridan, and as it had been pretty well advertised and noised abroad, a large crowd witnessed the interesting and exciting scene. An excursion party, mostly from St. Louis, consisting of about a hundred gentlemen and ladies, came out on a special train to view the sport, and among the number was my wife, with little baby Artie, who had come to remain with me for a while.

The buffaloes were quite plenty, and it was agreed that we should go into the same herd at the same time and "make a

run," as we called it, each one killing as many as possible. A referee was to follow each of us on horseback when we entered the herd, and count the buffaloes killed by each man. The St. Louis excursionists, as well as the other spectators, rode out to the vicinity of the hunting grounds in wagons and on horseback, keeping well out of sight of the buffaloes, so as not to frighten them, until the time came for us to dash into the herd — when they were to come up as near as they pleased and witness the chase.

We were fortunate in the first run in getting good ground. Comstock was mounted on one of his favorite horses, while I rode old Brigham. I felt confident that I had the advantage of Comstock in two things: first, I had the best buffalo horse that ever made a track; and second, I was using what was known at that time as the needle-gun, a breech-loading Springfield rifle — calibre 50, — it was my favorite old "Lucretia," which has already been introduced to the notice of the reader; while Comstock was armed with a Henry rifle, and although he could fire a few shots quicker than I could, yet I was pretty certain that it did not carry powder and lead enough to do execution equal to my calibre 50.

A DASH INTO THE HERD.

At last the time came to begin the match. Comstock and I dashed into a herd, followed by the referees. The buffaloes separated; Comstock took the left bunch and I the right. My great *forte* in killing buffaloes from horseback was to get them circling by riding my horse at the head of the herd, shooting the leaders, thus crowding their followers to the left, till they would finally circle round and round.

On this morning the buffaloes were very accommodating, and I soon had them running in a beautiful circle, when I dropped them thick and fast, until I had killed thirty-eight; which finished my run. Comstock began shooting at the rear of the herd which he was chasing, and they kept straight on. He succeeded, however, in killing twenty-three, but they were scattered over a distance of three miles, while mine lay close together. I had



THE GREAT BUFFALO-KILLING MATCH.

“nursed” my buffaloes, as a billiard-player does the balls when he makes a big run.

After the result of the first run had been duly announced, our St. Louis excursion friends — who had approached to the place where we had stopped — set out a lot of champagne, which they had brought with them, and which proved a good drink on a Kansas prairie, and a buffalo hunter was a good man to get away with it.

While taking a short rest, we suddenly spied another herd of buffaloes coming toward us. It was only a small drove, and we at once prepared to give the animals a lively reception. They proved to be a herd of cows and calves — which, by the way, are quicker in their movements than the bulls. We charged in among them, and I concluded my run with a score of eighteen, while Comstock killed fourteen. The score now stood fifty-six to thirty-seven, in my favor.

#### AN EXHIBITION FOR THE LADIES.

Again the excursion party approached, and once more the champagne was tapped. After we had eaten a lunch which was spread for us, we resumed the hunt. Striking out for a distance of three miles, we came up close to another herd. As I was so far ahead of my competitor in the number killed, I thought I could afford to give an extra exhibition of my skill. I had told the ladies that I would, on the next run, ride my horse without saddle or bridle. This had raised the excitement to fever heat among the excursionists, and I remember one fair lady who endeavored to prevail upon me not to attempt it.

“That’s nothing at all,” said I; “I have done it many a time, and old Brigham knows as well as I what I am doing, and sometimes a great deal better.”

So, leaving my saddle and bridle with the wagons, we rode to the windward of the buffaloes, as usual, and when within a few hundred yards of them we dashed into the herd. I soon had thirteen laid out on the ground, the last one of which I had

driven down close to the wagons, where the ladies were. It frightened some of the tender creatures to see the buffalo coming at full speed directly toward them; but when he had got within fifty yards of one of the wagons, I shot him dead in his tracks. This made my sixty-ninth buffalo, and finished my third and last run, Comstock having killed forty-six.

As it was now late in the afternoon, Comstock and his backers gave up the idea that he could beat me, and thereupon the referees declared me the winner of the match, as well as the champion buffalo-hunter of the plains.\*

On our way back to camp, we took with us some of the choice meat and finest heads. In this connection it will not be out of place to state that during the time I was hunting for the Kansas Pacific, I always brought into camp the best buffalo heads, and turned them over to the company, who found a very good use for them. They had them mounted in the best possible manner, and sent them to all the principal cities and railroad centers in the country, having them placed in prominent positions at the leading hotels, depots, and other public buildings, as a sort of trade-mark, or advertisement, of the Kansas Pacific railroad; and to-day they attract the attention of the traveler almost everywhere. Whenever I am traveling over the country and see one of these trade-marks, I feel pretty certain that I was the cause of the death of the old fellow whose body it once ornamented, and many a wild and exciting hunt is thus called to mind.

The end of the track finally reached Sheridan, in the month of May, 1868, and as the road was not to be built any farther just

\* Poor Billy Comstock was afterwards treacherously murdered by the Indians. He and Sharpe Grover visited a village of Indians, supposed to be peaceably inclined, near Big Spring station, in Western Kansas; and after spending several hours with the red-skins in friendly conversation, they prepared to depart, having declined an invitation to pass the night there. It appears that Comstock’s beautiful white-handled revolver had attracted the attention of the Indians, who overtook him and his companion when they had gone about half a mile. After surrounding the two men they suddenly attacked them. They killed, scalped and robbed Comstock; but Grover, although severely wounded, made his escape, owing to the fleetness of the excellent horse which he was riding. This sad event occurred August 27.



DEATH OF BILLY CONSTOCK.

then, my services as a hunter were not any longer required. At this time there was a general Indian war raging all along the Western borders. General Sheridan had taken up his headquarters at Fort Hays, in order to be in the field to superintend the campaign in person. As scouts and guides were in great demand, I concluded once more to take up my old avocation of scouting and guiding for the army.

BRIGHAM AND I PART COMPANY.

Having no suitable place in which to leave my old and faithful buffalo-hunter Brigham, and not wishing to kill him by scouting, I determined to dispose of him. I was very reluctant to part with him, but I consoled myself with the thought that he would not be likely to receive harder usage in other hands than he had in mine. I had several good offers to sell him; but at the suggestion of some gentlemen in Sheridan, all of whom were anxious to obtain possession of the horse, I put him up at a raffle, in order to give them all an equal chance of becoming the owner of the famous steed. There were ten chances at thirty dollars each, and they were all quickly taken.

Old Brigham was won by a gentleman — Mr. Ike Bonham — who took him to Wyandotte, Kansas, where he soon added new laurels to his already brilliant record. Although I am getting ahead of my story, I must now follow Brigham for a while. A grand tournament came off four miles from Wyandotte, and Brigham took part in it. As has already been stated, his appearance was not very prepossessing, and nobody suspected him of being anything but the most ordinary kind of a plug. The friends of the rider laughed at him for being mounted on such a dizzy-looking steed. When the exercises — which were of a very tame character, being more for style than speed — were over, and just as the crowd was about to return to the city, a purse of \$250 was made up, to be given to the horse that could first reach Wyandotte, four miles distant. The arrangement was carried out, and Brigham was entered as one of the contestants for the purse. Everybody laughed at Mr. Bonham when it became

known that he was to ride that poky-looking plug against the five thoroughbreds which were to take part in the race.

When all the preliminaries had been arranged, the signal was given, and off went the horses for Wyandotte. For the first half-mile several of the horses led Brigham, but on the second mile he began passing them one after another, and on the third mile he was in advance of them all, and was showing them the road at a lively rate. On the fourth mile his rider let him out, and arrived at the hotel — the home-station — in Wyandotte a long way ahead of his fastest competitor.

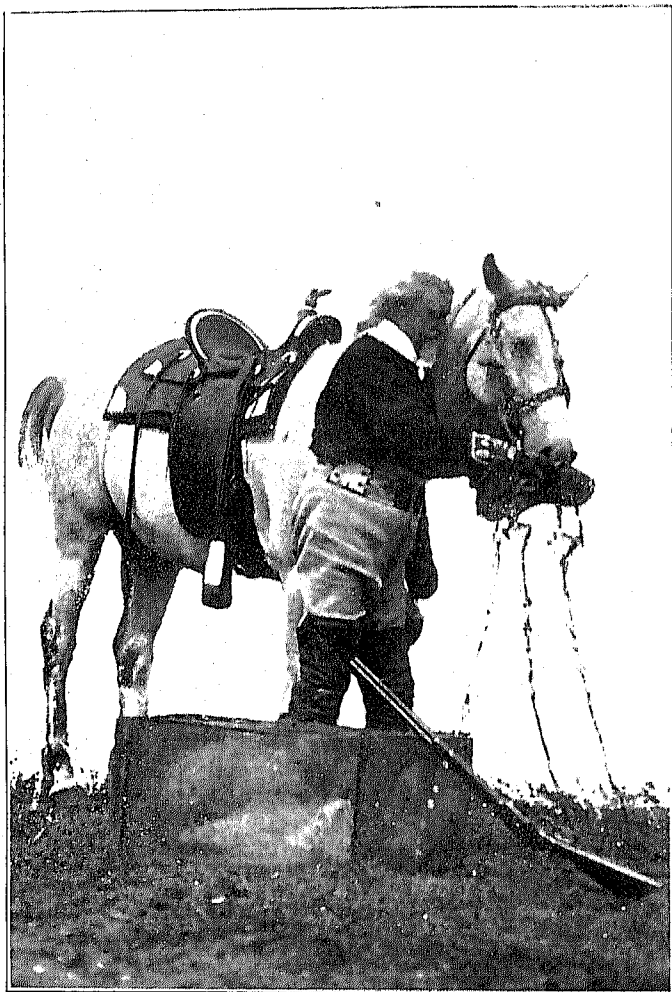
Everybody was surprised as well as disgusted, that such a homely "critter" should be the winner. Brigham, of course, had already acquired a wide reputation, and his name and exploits had often appeared in the newspapers, and when it was learned that this "critter" was none other than the identical buffalo-hunting Brigham, nearly the whole crowd admitted that they had heard of him before, and had they known him in the first place they certainly would have ruled him out.

But to return to the thread of my narrative, from which I have wandered. Having received the appointment of guide and scout, and having been ordered to report at Fort Larned, then commanded by Captain Dangerfield Parker, I saw it was necessary to take my family — who had remained with me at Sheridan after the buffalo-hunting match — to Leavenworth and there leave them. This I did at once, and after providing them with a comfortable little home I returned and reported for duty at Fort Larned.



A GREAT SHOWMAN

Colonel Cody was not only famous as a scout, hunter, and Indian fighter, but had an international reputation as a showman and evidenced great genius in organizing and managing the "Wild West Exhibition."



**"A THIRSTY COMRADE"**

Buffalo Bill's thoughtful attention in giving his horse a drink from his own hat was thoroughly characteristic of the man in all his relations with animals, as well as with people.



**BUCKSKIN CHARLIE,  
WAR-CHIEF OF THE UTES.**



AMERICAN HORSE, SIOUX CHIEF.

Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution.