



## **A Means of Preserving the Purity and Establishing a Career for the American Bison of the Future**

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A MEANS OF PRESERVING THE PURITY AND ESTABLISHING A CAREER FOR THE AMERICAN BISON OF THE FUTURE.

BY ROBERT C. AULD.

## I.

THE American bison is, as it nearly always has been, and ever will be, possibly the most interesting and attractive of all mammals. The lamentable, outrageous war of extermination to which he has been subjected is certainly one atrocious specimen of man's most wanton foolishness, for which he ought to blush. Doubtless that extermination is at last regarded with the keenest feelings of remorse; which, though now of so little avail, yet fill those who have latterly championed his cause with fond desires for the recuperation of what is apparently almost a vanishing race. The American bison is, in his royalty, gone,—“passed over” into history. The hardly even smoldering embers that remain,—can they be nursed, fanned into a greater brilliance that might give one the hope of their being revived into a more life-like, enduring flame?

From numbers that would have put into total insignificance the combined forces of all the various bovine species (and races), for instance, there now remain—how many? The very best that Mr. W. T. Hornaday can figure, they can *only* be marshalled at a total of one thousand and ninety-one in the entire world. This number

is less, positively, than that claimed by even some of our most improved domestic bovine races. The enumeration takes into account, of course, all individual and scattered specimens in different foreign Zoological Gardens, which are uninfluential on the main body on which depends the fate—so doubtful now—of the species. This main body, this specific entity, this restricted, smothered force, on which the future fate of recuperation depends,—that is, taking into account those only which we know of that can, or could, be utilized for ordinary breeding purposes,—the most that we could liberally estimate such a force at would not be far from about two hundred and fifty. Two-and-a-half hundred: can we do anything for you to redeem the obloquy of the past? Is it possible to preserve that trivial remnant? It would seem presumption to make any assertion to that effect in the face of the transforming rapidity of the extermination from the many countless hordes to the few insignificant herds. Those most interested in the fate of this remnant have, I fear, dire misgivings as to the result. For an animal that was so long so absolutely monarch of his prairie domain,—till the relentless and vicious paleface and the no less destructively inclined redman, finding him generally such an easy prey to their various refined and rude means of murder, made so much more resistless by an animal that had not yet learned the fear of, or to beware of, man's ruse or craft, reduced him to his present state of insignificance,—for such an animal to be expected to re-create itself into some more enduring adjunct of his old enemy's wants, would seem unnatural. The products that were the incitement to this awful slaughter had to be piled almost horizon-high, and then it was not enough to subdue the insatiable, inconsiderate greed of the so-called honorable hunter who followed such a legitimate calling. The lucre-returning "product" was only a trifling portion of the whole. The waste was outrageous, stupendous in its extravagance. Hence the Assyrian-like destruction. For an animal that had reared itself through centuries' implantation of nature's own freedom, instinct, unrestraint, and environment, to be dragged through such abject degradation, and be asked to survive, would seem an insult to this lagging behind,

"superfluous on the stage," left all alone. It would be a modern incongruity, not an instance.

From the generally apparent characteristics and qualities of the species, the sympathizer would entertain—regretfully entertain—a decided negative. Yet often when there is least expectation hope revives.

The buffalo has had, even during all that destruction-dealing process, before his death throes, observers who have, incidentally it would appear, recorded a certain number of facts about their, too noble prey, which are now positively encouraging to us. For instance, for an animal regarded to be an embodiment of mammalian ferocity, it would appear incredible that such an animal should have any inherent traits of gentility or docility. But such is, indeed, the fact. In his experiences with his bitter foe, as fore-stated, ere the latter days of his regal existence,—before the knowledge of that foe's contiguity engendered an idea of a danger to flee from, which became an instinct and thence an hereditary transmission,—he was indifferent, even disdainful, of the feeling of his comrades at his side; proud, confident in the midst of the great horde that, unaffected still, stood its ground. During that period there are numerous records of calves which, in the hunt or onslaught, having been left behind or become separated from the main body, and particularly from their own dams, were very easily, by simple means, attached to the destroyer of his maternal and paternal mainstay, and "blindly" following at the heels of the man-horse murderer, with all the same signs of affection they would show to their own dams. That trait was, surely, a strong one, indicating a strong nature or disposition, shaped and controlled in the most pronounced manner by environment; just as sure in captivity to be influenced by the subduing, gentling power of man when exerted on an immediate object and with certain kind solicitude, which was fully reciprocated in that object, as in nature to be influenced by the overcoming fierce, instincts of free environment, when that was provocative of suspicion and antagonism to their worst, latterly forced-on-them, natural enemy. Such calf-disposition was a strange concomitant; and for us it is a starting-point in that which makes us hope.

Indeed, when we come to investigate further, we find that even from the earliest times the great and ferocious American buffalo had been subdued, domesticated in fact, and even crossed with the farm bovine. This buffalo blood doubtless runs in the veins of a proportion of the common bovines of to-day as another "alloy," showing how easily his type could be absorbed.

When we press this point to its utmost we find that the buffalo is fully amenable to the domesticating process; and further that he demeans and conducts himself similarly and as truly as his more sedate and cooler-blooded bovine cousins. What is suitable to the one is suitable to the other.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving that most important point of domesticability, it might yet be objected that we would have no use for the species. Well, we assert that the buffalo, considering the conditions under which he has been reared—as seen and delineated by Catlin—on his native heath,<sup>2</sup> is far and away ahead of the common bovine as a beef animal, naturally fed. Compare this animal in his natural bisontine condition with the fleshless results among the bovines under the same conditions, in spring or at any period, on the former's prairie or the latter's ranche or range, and our assertion is at once borne out. This, remember, on "grass alone." Here, then, we have in the buffalo an animal exactly evolved out of his environment to fill the true American beef-producing animal's place, without any recourse to the tricks of shelter or winter fodder, as conceived by man for the benefit of a more cosmopolitan constructed bovine. We have gone far enough on these two lines to bring us to the great conclusions as to the buffalo necessary for our plea, viz :

1. His amenability to domesticity being perfect.
2. His economic value being incomparable.

<sup>1</sup> See article by the writer, "The American Buffalo: Its Past and Future," in the February number of *Baily's Magazine of Sports and Pastimes*. Vinton & Co., London, Eng.

<sup>2</sup> See Report of National Museum, 1886-'87, on "The Extermination of the American Bison," by William T. Hornaday.

## II.

Having come to this most important conclusion, that in the American buffalo we have an animal superbly endowed by nature, not by artifice, to fill the bovine requirements of this country, made ready to hand, but his thorough adaptability unperceived or selfishly overlooked, we have now to consider the possibility of realizing our dream: *i.e.*, establishing his destiny as an animal of such utility as is proved he possesses. We can resign the old romance, but we can not risk the reality in so far as that can be preserved and enhanced. The buffalo, as he has been known, will be known no more. Established in the place his destinators would prepare for him, he will be an entirely different-natured—and even nurtured—being from that from which he was forcibly exiled; and, fulfilling the mission proposed for him, he will become greatly modified from the noble monarch of old. This is inevitable and consequent. We see the effect of the same treatment on the bovine species, which was also a wild species subdued at a comparatively recent period. Even the wild white cattle of Britain, kept in the parks from the earliest times, the most direct descendants of *Bos urus* (*primigenius*), are greatly modified from their ancestors by the restricted area and nature of their confinement. So it is with the truest representative of the buffalo in Europe, the Aurochs (*Bison priscus*) of the Lithuanian forests. But for all these instances we believe that in the buffalo of the future we shall, as the result of our judicious interference, our subduction and care, the resultant of his removal from his natural environment, see arise a new race thoroughly capable of enacting an undreamt-of career, and that with happier results than might formerly have been possible; for that former career of his was apparently doomed and destined to be sooner or later played out on the plains that witnessed his early glory.

We have now to consider the species as it is, for our purpose; its numbers and how composed. The following list gives the location of the different herds and numbers they contain, fit for breeding purposes, in the United States. The location simply is

given ; further full particulars may be found in the elaborate report referred to in the note :

Location of Herd.	Number.
Garden City, Kan., . . . . .	115
Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana, . . . . .	35
Clarendon, Texas, . . . . .	13
Bismark Grove, Kan., . . . . .	10
Fort Bennet, Dak., . . . . .	9
Rapid City, Dak., . . . . .	4
Wood Lawn, Neb., . . . . .	5
Hamline, Minn., . . . . .	2
Glen Island, N. Y., . . . . .	4
Other places, . . . . .	12
Wild West Show, . . . . .	18
Public Park, Philadelphia, . . . . .	10
“ “ Chicago, . . . . .	7
“ “ Cincinnati, . . . . .	4
“ “ New York, . . . . .	4
“ “ Washington, . . . . .	2
	<hr/>
	254

For comparison we give the following figures to show the distribution of the entire number known :

Total captive, fit for breeding purposes in	
America, . . . . .	254
Wild, under Government protection in Yellowstone Park, . . . . .	200
Running wild unprotected :	
In United States, . . . . .	85
In Athabasca, . . . . .	550
In foreign countries, . . . . .	7
	<hr/>
Total, . . . . .	1096 <sup>3</sup>

It will thus be seen that the number of those fit for breeding is only a fourth of the entire number. This number might

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 458, 525, of Mr. Hornaday's Report already noted.

possibly be added to in the future by new captures from the wild herds. Now, what do we propose to do with these remnants to preserve them from the surest forms of destruction that seemingly await them, if not carefully avoided: (*a*) in breeding, and (*b*) out-crossing? For there is just now as much danger from the latter as from the former.

We are not in the position of the "early improvers" of the bovine race; that is, of those who took it in hand within the last hundred years to rescue from a conglomerate promiscuity the various types of bovine excellence. By them in-breeding was necessary, essential, primarily, to establish the type. Their period of out-crossing had been going on during the centuries previous to the commencement of the improving period. But we have no type to establish; in fact, hardly any characteristics to improve; we have only to use those means of amelioration which captivity, that is, domesticity, brings. Therefore we, and it is fortunate for us, do not need to resort to the usual initial essential of in-breeding. But that is, nevertheless, the chief thing; in fact, with the limited alliances at our disposal, the main thing to avoid. And it is as to a means to avoid that, that the vital purpose of this paper is designed to deal.

The danger of out-crossing is the establishment of a mixed or bastard race of bisontine-bovines. The danger is real, but the means of avoiding the first danger—in-breeding—covers this.

With the alliances existing, what can be done to increase them, and not to circumscribe their area, not to bring their points of convergence too close? We have to widen these points as much as possible. Within the limits of the existing relationships—which are in reality just now sufficiently distant, that is, in so far as tracing to their common ancestors is concerned—we have to out-cross as much as possible. This would appear to be an easy matter to do, by the simple interchange of blood from one herd to another. But that, under existing conditions of ownership, and want of cohesion of breeders as a whole, would likely soon prove abortive. We have to look for some means of effecting cohesion and a unity of purpose and interest among owners and breeders.



Let us avail ourselves of the experience, now so well methodized, of our forebears, the pioneers of improvement among the gentler bovine races. Their rescue from common obliteration was the Herd Book, and, in Great Britain at least, every distinct breed has now its register. The latest established ones have, practically, been the means of rescuing from obliteration certain valuable races. We learn an important lesson from this.

But we imagine we hear a whisper: But we have so few to register. Patience! In collecting material for forming the foundation of such an undertaking, the number of the individuals composing such foundation, even in the largest bovine breeds, numerically fell short, we imagine, of the number of individuals we buffalo men possess. Besides, our individuals are absolutely pure, and all up to the highest standard. It was not so with the bovine races. We have therefore the advantage of our cousins. Our subject is, if such a register were initiated to-day, at a point that it took at least a quarter of a century for the bovine improvers to accomplish. Of course it must be admitted that the bovines did not, could not, start with the certainty of absolute purity, because of the mixing between races previous to the initiating of these registers. In that our bovines had an advantage over us, as it relieved them considerably of the greatest and immediate danger of in-breeding, which they were able thence to resort to, but which we have to avoid. Is such a register possible for the the buffalo? I think so. Let us see.

We start, we believe, with a larger "foundation stock," and absolute purity—no sub-standards—as compared with the bovines: the two desirable essentials. We should therefore obtain a complete record of all the male and female buffaloes fit for breeding. We should have their relationship to each other noted, traced, and arranged in systematic manner.

Whom would we look to to undertake this? We have the National Zoological Park, recently established at Washington from the very interest manifested in the "passing of the buffalo," for the purpose of providing a receptacle for the remains of this noble representative of American fauna, and resuscitating it from total or immediate obliteration. As therefore such was the

origin of this National Park, we would put the matter under the superintendence of its accomplished Director, Mr. W. T. Hornaday, to whom our mutual friend, the buffalo (what remains of him) owes so much, to organize such a register for the regeneration of the bison, with such help as the Government could supply that would be necessary.

Such a register should have entered therein, in systematic manner, and with such full details as could be obtained, the history of each remaining herd and each male and female individually composing it. An inspector of the herds might be advantageously appointed to collect such matter on the spot. The initial entries at least should be free of charge; and such points as the following might be recorded:

1. Location of herd.
2. As near as possible, age, place of birth, or capture, of the original members of the herd.
3. Affidavit of purity.
4. For each younger member of the herd, sire and dam grandsire and granddam, if necessary.
5. Description, according to a schedule of details, with photographs if possible.
6. Nomenclature to be governed by the proverb that "brevity is the soul of wit," that is, each individual entry to be named; the name to be short and of one word. Indian names would be most appropriate, or such short names as have a direct connection with the subject.
7. Pedigree to rank through the side of the dam, which establishes the best means of afterwards tracing each succeeding entry, especially of sires.
8. As an appendix, a bibliography of the subject would be useful.

Such a register would make a handsome and highly interesting volume. Distributed among the breeders, they, sending in constant, periodical reports, would become generally and specially bound together in one great united experiment. From this intercourse and correspondence of the whole, judicious interchanges could be continuously made from time to time, and the process

and results of breeding constantly watched and guarded. Breeders, being bound by a common interest, would have the best means at their disposal of avoiding the fatal extermination of their herds, from an insufficient knowledge—without this source of intelligence—by too dangerous in-breeding. The register would supply them with the means of avoidance, the power of tracing to divergence the relationships of the sires and dams of stock for which they might desire to interchange. Thus divergent lines of relationships would be established, instead of their breeding to a convergent point, so that a broadening foundation would be obtained. Then the American buffalo would take rank as the true, because indigenous, beef ruminant, and have its place alongside the proudest breed of bovines in existence.

Thus the two fatal possibilities of (1) crossing-out, and (2) breeding-in, which must ever menace the uncertain existence of the buffalo, without such a method of prevention, would be entirely avoided. No better method than the one herein advocated can we conceive for the purpose designed than the register. The number of separate herds that such a register would develop would be vitality itself to "the breed." I think I hear this entire proposal scouted at as bold and chimerical. But this there can be little doubt is about the only chance left for rehabilitating the species as a whole. Breeding would then become a fine art; and it would put the undertaking on a lasting financial and commercial basis.