

THE PLAIN-HUNTING BUSINESS

The last of the "*gens de la prairie*" have arrived. For a week past, they have been coming in—the late bad weather having proved too severe a test of strength and speed, for them all to arrive together. Generally speaking, the hunters have been very successful: in some cases, only partially so. Profitable or not, however, the hunting business is over for the year. The three regular, annual hunting expeditions to the western plains of Dacotah have already done their work. All is quiet once more. The occasion is, we think, a fitting one for the consideration of the bearings and influences of buffalo-hunting, viewed as the business, or regular, ordinary pursuit of a large proportion of the Red River people.

Some hundreds of young men and old take a jaunt out west, two or three times every year, to provide themselves with meat provisions. What

they do not actually use, they dispose of for clothing, groceries, and other necessaries. This seems right and proper enough. Everybody has a right to choose the particular method by which he is to make a living—so long, at least, as he does not engage in any business positively illegal or immoral. Still, there are certain respects in which this mode of obtaining a livelihood must be considered objectionable. We believe that it unsettles the minds of those engaged in it—“un-entles” them, in the sense that they become unfit for those steady and sure, though slow, pursuits which characterise the industrious and the successful in every country. It creates an undue relish for the novel and the exciting, and in the same proportion a dislike of honest, genuine labor. Is this mere theory? It is certainly correct in theory, for our love of ease is natural and strong; and when fostered, soon over-rides all the promptings of a wise forethought, self-interest, or ambition. But we are not borne out by reason alone:

our statement will bear the test of facts and everyday experience. It might be said that the hunting is not so much a *cause* of un-ettled, indolent habits, as a *result* or consequence of them—that is, that the plain-hunters do not become careless or slothful by following this occupation, but follow it because they are so. This distinction may be rather nice and metaphysical; yet we must admit that it has some foundation. As a general thing, the hunters are French or English H lbreds—principally the former—and they naturally enough possess traits of character peculiar both to the red man and the white. Their tastes and habits

It also encourages extravagance. The quantity of meat provisions consumed by the hunters is something enormous. Although numbering but six or seven hundred souls—counting men, women and children—they use, or rather misuse, as much as would suffice for six or seven thousand in Great Britain, France or Germany. It is no adequate answer to say that, having little else, they are obliged to use more than they otherwise would are, in fact, a sort of compromise. They follow to some extent, the quiet, plodding occupations of the European; but to some extent also the primitive, easy-going, pleasure-giving pursuits of the Indian. This is quite natural and reasonable; and therefore we admit that our plain-hunters may be, to a great extent, biassed by physical causes independent of, and anterior to, all acquired habits. Still, we hold that the practice of buffalo-hunting is a cause as well as an effect—it is active as well as passive—it creates or strengthens, as well as indicates, restless habits.

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has this become among them, that the man who is free from debt is accounted a rare curiosity.

Again. The education and general up-bringing of the young are much neglected. Boys and girls, instead of being kept at school and otherwise trained in what may be useful and beneficial, are made to wander about all summer, like savages. And as to church going and Sabbath-keeping, they are out of the question. So strongly have the Catholic clergy felt this, that they usually send out a priest with the party!

This hunting life denotes a rude or primitive state of society. History teaches that a people who live by hunting are only in the first stage of civilisation. The various periods of a nation's growth may be denominated, the hunting, the pastoral, the agricultural and the manufacturing. We do not believe that this regular series will be developed in this country, for such gradations are traceable only in the case of a people emerging from barbarism by their own exertions; but we do think that the first link in the chain holds good here. Our professional hunters are passionately fond of their occupation. They look forward to the summer's duties with the greatest longing: the pleasures of the chase form the all-absorbing topic at the fire-side and by the way. And why so? Because the business just suits the tastes of nature's children. It is pleasant—allows plenty of time for trifling—requires no skill, and no patient or painful exertion. This is the reason why

it is with them the occupation of occupations ; but this very reason stamps it as an outlandish, temporary make-shift, quite unworthy of people pretending to a respectable degree of civilisation. We can understand the eagerness and the relish with which the gentleman-traveller betakes himself to buffalo-hunting. It is something new, and something professedly for pleasure. His case is very different, however, from that of those who live by it and for it—who attend to it as formally and regularly as the farmer does to his fields, or the merchant to his goods. No. Our hunters ought, as soon as practicable, to relinquish their present method of gaining a livelihood. It is a very precarious one at best, and cannot be expected to last for ever. Either the Minnesota authorities will put a stop to these gratuitous excursions into their territories, or the ruinous annual slaughter will exterminate the buffalo ;

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