



Buffalo Hunt, Chasing Back, plate 12 from the "North American Indian Portfolio"

Date

1845

Primary Maker

George Catlin

Medium

Color lithograph on paper

Description

"Turn about is fair play," according to an old and familiar adage;

and in these wild and thrilling scenes we often meet it almost too literally to be willing to admit the justness of its application. The wounded and chafed bull often turns upon its assailant, and runs him back, over the whole ground; in which unpleasant reverse he has but to balance himself upon his little horse, praying for smooth ground under its feet, and deliverance from the fury that is behind him. "This picturesque and jagged outline of hills only requires the background of a dark, lurid cloud; and if viewed from a distance it will need but little stretch of the imagination to conceive it to be a magnificent castle, fit for the residence of the proudest monarch on earth. "I was mounted on a small Indian horse; on my head was a broad-brimmed, low-crowned white hat, which, from having often performed the double office of pillow and nightcap by night, and of umbrella by day, was almost indescribable in form; a blue shirt, and a black velveteen shooting-jacket, with enormous pockets stuffed full of a strange miscellany of requisites, covered my upper man. I wore neither neckcloth, braces, nor waistcoat. Around my waist was a strong leathern belt, in which were stuck my hunting-knife and a brace of pistols in front; and at the side, a short, heavy iron-handled 'cut-and-thrust' sword; my nether extremities were protected by a stout pair of corduroy breeches and buckskin leggins, fitting the leg; and in my right hand was my faithful double-barrelled rifle. At length a momentary halt was given, and a hurried proclamation issued amongst the Pawnees, that 'the men must be ready.' We were drawn up on one side of a hill, below which was a valley of no great depth, and on the other side another hill intersected by many ravines, down each of which a black living torrent of buffaloes was pouring into the valley. I rode towards the first which Fate threw in my way; and he seemed inclined in no way to hurry his pace or to change the direction in which he was lazily cantering along. He was indeed a magnificent bull, of the very largest size, and had the thickest fell of hair that I had seen on the prairie. . . . My ball struck him a few inches behind the heart, and one moment he paused, as I thought, about to fall; but it was only to glare his eyes fiercely upon me, lash his tail, and then charge me at full speed. It would have been madness to have expended my last shot, so I reserved it for a mortal struggle, in case my horse and I should be overthrown, and in the meantime urged him with hand, leg, and spur, to his utmost exertions. I looked over my shoulder, and for the distance of a hundred yards I knew not how the race would terminate, as his thundering hoofs, glaring eyes, and nostrils throwing out bloody froth, were close at my horse's flank. However, I could soon perceive that, from his unwieldy size, and the severe wound I had given him, he was failing in strength, and I accordingly pressed my little horse to place me further out of his reach. As soon as he saw that his efforts at revenge had failed, he stopped short, stamped, blew, bellowed, and made all the most furious gestures of rage and pain. When I was again about fifty yards from him, I pulled up, and determined to wait two or three minutes; very prudently reflecting that in the mean time my horse was recovering breath, while my enemy was bleeding and exhausting himself by empty demonstrations of fury. As soon as I thought my horse ready for a new race, if necessary, I dismounted and fired with better aim and effect; the bull staggered a few paces, and rolled in the dust." (Travels of the Hon. C. A. Murray, in the Pawnee Country, in 1834-6; vol. i., p. 390.) Mr. Murray, I am sure, will pardon me for representing him in a retreat, which I would scarcely venture to do were he dealing with ordinary enemies; and those of my readers who know anything of the character of contentions with a wounded Buffalo Bull will easily acquit me of any attempt in this, to question the valor of my honorable and esteemed friend.

Dimensions

Composition: 13 11/16 × 18 7/16 in. (34.7 × 46.8 cm) Sheet: 15 9/16 × 22 3/16 in. (39.6 × 56.3 cm)