

Forest and Stream

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A PREMIUM ON CRIME

The killing of ten buffalo in the National Park by a skin hunter from Cooke City and his capture by the Government scout is announced in another column. The news comes to us from a staff correspondent now on the ground, and while for the present full details are lacking, the capture is unquestioningly the most important that has ever been made in the National Park.

The occurrence calls public attention again and most forcibly to the criminal negligence of which Congress has been guilty for all these years in failing to provide any form of government for the Park, or to establish any process of law by which crimes against the public committed within the borders can be punished. The result is that, although misdemeanors and crimes of many different grades have been perpetrated in the Park, only in exceptional cases has any punishment been meted out to the offenders. Practically the only punishment that can be visited on the criminal is to lock him up in the guardhouse. In other words, a man while in the National Park is not subject to the law of the land; within its borders he may without fear of punishment do those things which are forbidden in all other parts of the country.

Such a condition is not only an anomaly under our form of government, but a disgrace to every American citizen. Every citizen shares with all the others the ownership in the wonders of our National pleasure ground, and when its natural features are defaced, its forests destroyed, and its game butchered, each one is injured by being robbed of so much that belongs to him.

There is at present no remedy. Representatives elected by the people to guard their interests have steadily refused to enact bills brought before Congress for the protection of the National Park, or if willing to enact them have insisted on nullifying the good that they might do by coupling with the good provisions, others wholly bad and menacing the Park and all that it contains. A measure which should merely protect the Park has in it nothing to excite the enthusiasm of the politician; there is the hope neither of gain nor of political preferment-- nothing but the public good-- and the average politician is not looking about him to see how he can benefit the public. His ambitions are more modest. He is quite satisfied if he can benefit himself.

The man Howell, who has just been arrested, has destroyed property belonging to the government-- that is, to the people-- which was worth from \$2,500 to \$5,000; yet if we may judge the future by the past, he will be allowed to go on his way practically without punishment. If he had committed a similar act anywhere else-- if he had destroyed government horses or mules or grain or supplies of this sort to this extent-- he would have served a long time in prison. So long as these lewd fellows of the baser sort, who lack only daring to be horse thieves and rustlers, know that they will not be punished for their invasions of the Park, ten regiments of troops could not protect it against their raids, but let it once be known that punishment will follow swiftly on the heels of capture, and they will give the Park a wide berth. As things stand at present, they laugh at the troops.

Behind the miserable scoundrels that commit the depredations are the still more cowardly wretches, who by offering high prices for skins and heads, tempt the poachers. These men are more contemptible than their tools, for they have not the courage to face the cold and snows of the mountains, the fatigues of the chase or the chances of capture. They merely buy the spoils. They are the "fences."

In the Yellowstone Park the buffalo-- remnant of a continent-- have increased year by year, until now they number perhaps 500; most curious ornaments, the rarest of the living wonders of our American Wonderland. But Congress, by its continued neglect, encourages the evil-minded to believe that they may penetrate even here and destroy this last remnant of a race long nearly extinct. It puts a premium on this crime.

A year ago this winter several buffalo were killed; last spring and the spring before, a number of calves were captured; this winter ten buffalo have been slaughtered at a single killing. At this rate it will not be long before the last shall have been shot down. It is for the people to say whether or no they desire this.