STORIES OF THE OLD WEST AS TOLD AND PAINTED BY THE COW PUNCHER AND ARTIST, ED. BOREIN: BY A. B. STEWART

THE dream of every tenderfoot who has read of cowboys and Indians, is to sit by a camp-fire and listen to tales of the early West. In the work of Ed. Borein, the life of the cow puncher, the traditions of the Indian, and the stirring fights in the winning of the West find a fresh and permanent expression. These things are part of his life. He has lived among the Indians, and he has herded cattle, not for the sake of telling a story or painting a picture, but as a business. Moreover, in his studio the old camp-fire seems perpetually alight. There all the sons of the West find their way,—Charlie Russell, the painter from Great Falls, Montana, Seth Hathaway, the Indian fighter, Billie McGinty, cow puncher and Rough Rider, Charging Hawk, ex-Sioux scout and U. S. regular—one and all they get the trail as easily as across the plains, the mountains and the desert, and here the old stories are told and retold.

Many a good narrative survives from the buffalo days when the Indian lived off the herds which furnished him meat, clothing, war trappings, hides for his tepee and the material for his religious ceremonial. The Indian buffalo hunt was a model of efficiency and justice. When they needed meat the bucks rode into the herd, killed
what they thought they could use, and rode on. The squaws followed with the pack horses; stooping over each carcass for an instant to look at the arrow that pierced it, then going on until each squaw had found an arrow with the mark of a member of her family. Then skilfully she skinned the animal, cut up the meat, packed it on the horse, rolled up the hide and made her way back to camp. This custom is the material out of which Mr. Borein has made one of the most interesting of his pictures.

"I once asked an old Indian squaw," said the artist, after describing a buffalo hunt, "what would happen if two different arrows were found in the same carcass. She told me that in that case it belonged to the brave whose arrow had hit a vital spot. If both shots were vital, the meat and skin were given to some old people who could no longer hunt."

It is this form of communism, of primitive justice and kindness, that marked the Indian before his contact with civilization. Borein grows eloquent over the manhood and heroism of the early red man. The old saying, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," but proves, to him, an ignorance of the history and nature of this primitive race. There were no poor among the tribes. When disaster overtook a family and their horses were killed or their tepees burned and their
possessions destroyed in a fight or through misfortune, others who had plenty would start them up again. One would give a horse, another a tepee, another a blanket, and so on until all that was lost had been made up. Once equipped, the unfortunates were thus no longer dependent. Nor did this spirit apply only to those who had more than they needed. If there was but one piece of jerked meat in the camp, the owner would divide it amongst all, for he was trained in kindness, in justice and in honor.

EVERY act of an Indian from his birth to his death was in accordance with his religious belief. No people ever lived up to their religion more thoroughly. Even today the Indians on the reservations, civilized though they may seem to be, cling secretly to their superstitions and traditions. They have their war shirts and leggings hidden away waiting for the “Return of the Buffalo,” that Indian millenium which will mark the downfall of the white race and the rise to glory of the red. Indian religion touched all the common things of life with a mysterious wonder. They felt that the Great Spirit had put everything into the world for them and their purposes
and that everything created had a soul, personified by its shadow cast by the symbol of the Great Spirit, the sun. The spirit of the grass was no less real to the Indian than his own soul, which he called his "shadow self." Dwelling in his religion as he did, he saw a higher power in every manifestation of Nature, to which he looked with reverent eyes.

The white buffalo was sacred to him. Many a zoologist calls it a myth but the Indian knows, and around the rare beast he has gathered hundreds of traditions and religious rites. Here is the story of the last white buffalo known, as told to Ed. Borein by a Sioux half-breed, an old, old man.

Once upon a time, when he was young, he and another half-breed boy lived among their people. One day he was standing looking idly into the distance when he chanced to notice an old woman (who was a relative and lived in his family's tepee) coming down the hillside with a load of wood upon her back. That was commonplace enough. A moment later he saw her straighten up, drop her burden, look again across the country and then break into a run toward the camp.
“Hostiles advancing to attack,” was his first thought. But the old woman, reaching the tepee, whispered in his ear, “The buffalo are a mile to the north and a white one is in the herd.”

Without a word to anyone, the half-breed signaled his young companion and they caught their war horses, for ordinary buffalo horses were not fast enough for young enthusiasm. The old woman went silently into the tepee. Scouts reported the presence of the buffalo and the squaws went out to catch the horses. The boys did not wait. Stolidly and without curiosity the other Indians watched the departure. Assuredly it could be nothing serious or they, too, would have been told. Only the medicine man, wise in years, experience and tradition, knew better.

The two riders went into the herd but nowhere could they see their prize. They rode far, searching it. At last they saw it, a two-year-old cow, yellow with dust. Even at a distance, they could make out the black horns, the blue eyes and the gray hoofs. They shot at the same moment. The cow fell with two deadly bullets in her white hide. The hunters were young and knew little of the Indian ritual. Before they could dismount to lay hands on the sacred thing, the medicine man waved them back. He had come up with the whole fighting force of the tribe in line behind him. At a word from him, one of the bucks rode back to the camp to fetch forth a maiden. Meanwhile, the rest sat motionless upon their horses while the medicine man uttered his incantations and “made medicine” over the sacred carcass. The messenger speeded back from the camp and the maiden was brought forward, modest and hesitating, wondering that so great an honor should have been bestowed upon her. No one else touched the sacred buffalo as the maiden skinned it and prepared the hide according to the strictest of Sioux ceremonial. She tanned it, embroidered the inside with dyed porcupine quills and then turned it over to be used in the medicine lodge.

The news of the sacred possession spread outside the tribe, in time reaching the Cheyennes. Always eager for war against the Sioux, envy now prodded them on. The Cheyennes came and fought hard; the Sioux defended no less desperately, yet the invader won. With solemn rites the skin was carried to the conquerors’ camp. It became a religious duty to fight for the ownership of the white hide. The Blackfeet captured it from the Cheyennes. It passed from one tribe to another, leaving death behind it. For all that it was a thing to covet, to risk life winning and to die losing, it brought no fortune with it. Horses sickened and died, game failed, every trouble overtook the owners, yet the next tribe charged to battle just as eagerly.

Won by bloodshed, lost by death, the white buffalo hide made its
journey, the Sioux who shot it ever on its trail. It had passed out of his tribe, but the young half-breed who had heard the first whisper of it at the start, managed to get wind of its changing whereabouts. Possession might never again be his, but he would know its travels, its history and its holy wars. The man grew old. One by one, he had seen violent death overtake the medicine men who had the skin in keeping, until the Piegan in Canada came into possession of it. After that he lost the trace. It was long ago that he told the tale and he, too, has joined those who fought and died. With him passed away the white buffalo as a reality, to enter the region of tradition and story.

All Indian legends, of whatever tribe, are woven through the spiritual fabric of their religion. They are not all concerned with war and death, many are full of sweetness and poetry born of high native imagination. Such is the legend of the butterfly which Ed. Borein learned when he lived among the Navajos, and which he has embodied in one of the most characteristic of his pictures.

The Navajos think that the butterflies are children of the rainbow. When trouble overtakes them, they go out into the sunshine and catch a butterfly. This they put into a little brass or wicker cage and to it they come to tell their misfortunes. They need rain; the grass for their horses is gone; the water holes are dried up; the sheep are dying of the drought. If the butterfly dies, their prayers have not been heard by the Great Spirit. They must catch another. Then the band goes forth carrying the caged butterfly at its head until they find signs of a storm in the distance, for in that country rain may be seen miles and miles away, falling like a black shadow on a tiny spot in the wide sunny plain. As soon as they have seen the rain afar off, the Navajos look for the rainbow in the sunny sky above the rest of the plain. Then they set free the butterfly to soar up to its mother, the rainbow, that she may know the troubles of the poor Navajos, spread the rain cloud over them and keep the drought away in the future.

Among the visitors at the Borein studio Indian legends find a rival in interest in tales of frontier life and warfare. It was Charging Hawk, a former Sioux scout, who first told of an unexplained incident of the Custer fight. His father had been in the fight, and from him as well as from many others, Charging Hawk had heard the praises of the bravest man they ever saw. He was a long-haired man who fought so well that he won both the admiration and fear of his Indian opponents. The father of Charging Hawk came up with the second band to attack. The chief of the tribe, riding out of the melee to get a fresh horse, shouted to the oncoming warriors, "Five horses to the man who kills
Long Hair.” Wounded again and again, the white man kept on fighting until he fell, and the Indians missed not a single one of his brave acts. It was never known who killed him. No record has been found of him among the whites, and no one knows his name, but the fame of his exploits had been handed down, as a heritage from father to son, among his foes.

Another Indian echo of that battle is of a big black dog which escaped after the fight, just as the last white man went down. The Indians first saw the animal running around among the horses with a bundle of papers tied to its collar. Finally it took off north. They gave chase, but could neither catch nor kill it. For twenty miles they chased it and then lost track. What was on those papers? Were they Government documents or the last letters of a soldier to the folk back home? It remains one of the unsolved mysteries of the West.

One of the shortest, hardest fights of the frontier was that known as the Dobe Walls Fight between the Indians and the buffalo hunters north of the Panhandle. No one knows when the Dobe Walls were built, but an enterprising trader reaching the heart of the buffalo land, fixed them up as a trading post and here the hide hunters bought their supplies.

The story of the fight has been retold and rewritten many times. Medicine Men of the Cheyennes and the Kiowas had made war shirts which they said the white man’s bullets could not pierce. Secure in this belief, two or three hundred Indians went over to take the post. Singing, they came at an easy lope at daybreak, in two straight lines across the valley. It was a sight not easy to forget. When they were within a hundred yards of the place, they threw off their robes and blankets and charged down upon the camp. Ordinarily, the trading post boasted but two or at the most three men. By some chance nineteen had gathered there the night before to lay in their supplies. Billie Dixon, who was standing in the doorway when he saw the foes approach, emptied his Winchester into their ranks. Two of the hunters, with wagons loaded ready to return to their own camps, had slept outside. They ran for the house but could not make it. Dixon pulled one man through the doorway, but he died just across the threshold. The men inside loaded and shot and reloaded. Thrills were plentiful. An Indian boy, shot through the breast, rode twice around the house, hammering the walls with his six-shooter, before he fell from his horse. Three times the Indians charged. They fought all day, while the Indian women and children on a bluff across the valley, watched and sang. At sundown they retreated, leaving the ground strewn with lances, robes and buffalo hide shields, mute evidence of the medicine men’s mistake. So Seth Hathaway, Indian
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and buffalo hunter, told the story when he found his way into Borein's studio.

"It's a funny thing," he added, "but of the hundred or more horses left dead on the field, more than half were white. Now, an Indian admires a white horse above all others, and as it was found out later, the Government had just issued a lot of snow-white ones to the Cheyennes and the Kiowas as a reward for their being good Indians."

"When did you first hear of the fight?" asked the host, an insatiable hunter after Western lore.

"Oh," Hathaway said simply, "I was in it."

EVERYONE knows of the conquest of the West, but it takes Ed. Borein to tell what made the conquest possible. He is preeminently a painter of horses, and as such it incenses him to hear the exploits of Western heroes wherein no mention is made of the cayuse. The horse was brought into Mexico by Cortez and his followers. Those that escaped the Spaniards formed the nucleus of the herds of wild horses which later roamed the West. The Northern Indian has had the horse only upward of a hundred years. The Comanches were the first tribe to use them, walking hundreds of miles down into old or New Mexico to steal them. The Indian has not even a name for the horse in his language, calling it "big dog;" for the red man, like the Esquimo, formerly used dogs. It was the coming of the horse which made of him a traveler.

If the horse proved useful to the Indian, it was an utter necessity to the white man. Without its help the early Spanish explorers could never have come into the country from the South, nor could the later explorers and frontiersmen have reached the Far West, much less have held it. Many a hunter and cow puncher owes his life to his horse. Out on the open plains where there is no cover, a thrown horse makes the only possible rampart. To shoot a horse and crouch behind it has been the means of saving hundreds of lives in frontier warfare. If hard pressed and held up for a long time, men have been known to eat the meat of their own horses without leaving cover, a grim enough procedure. "Eating the fort," it has been termed in racy Western parlance. Mr. Borein would have considered his work incomplete without a drawing of the cayuse which "served as a rampart when dead."

The heroes of the West were not merely "scrapers," they were also business men. There were the trader, the trapper and the hunter, who brought civilization to the wilderness, and sent the spoils of the wilderness back to civilization. There was the prospector, who started all the mining camps from Arizona to Washington, with the
cities of Denver, Butte, Helena and scores of others to his credit. There was the stage driver, emissary of the Government and guardian of the mail, a famous story-teller and many-sided genius who watched out for robbers and Indians and the dangers of a precipitous road, all while managing his horses and answering the questions of his passengers. There was the cow puncher himself, not the drinking, roistering chap, or the college boy who had never seen a reata in the first paragraph, yet is teaching the ranch foreman in the sixth, but a steady, level-headed man who worked hard for a small salary and did not get a drink once in six months. These are some of the types to be found among the old-timers.

The cow puncher was the real settler of the West. Others drifted through and left, unless a town was started, but the cowboy stayed on the land. They were explorers, too, often riding afar, searching out new grass lands for the herds and even taking thousands of cattle to Montana from Texas when the grass failed there. The sheep herders came and "lawed them out" of the ranges, but the cow puncher has remained, next to the Indians, the most picturesque figure of the West. His era was a short one, two generations at most, whereas the Mexican vaquero, the first cowboy, has a record of two or three hundred years behind him. Yet, however brief, the day of the sagebrush pioneer was one of romance and breathless interest. Things are changed now. The old-timers, like the long-horned steers and the Spanish mustangs, have made way for a new order.
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In this very difference lies the historic value of Ed. Borein’s work. He is reproducing not only what he knows, from having seen, lived with and been a part of, but what no later artist will be able to find.

“You might as well look for Cortez in Mexico or Custer on the plains,” he will tell you. “The real cow puncher, like the trapper and the Indian, has gone. He’s a lot more extinct than the buffalo. Nowadays, a ranch is a place where you’ll find beer and a phonograph. There’s nothing left of the old West but the landscape, and the dry-farmers and irrigation ditches are changing that as fast as they can.”

But some of us are inclined to believe that in a New York studio at Times Square, the spirit of the vanished West, what the Indians called its “shadow self,” may yet be found.

“THE STRAY BUNCH”: FROM A DRAWING BY ED. BOREIN.