

## The Savage Allies of the Northwest

(Paper Two)

### ANIMALS AND GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE NORTHWEST DECADENCE OF THE TRIBES

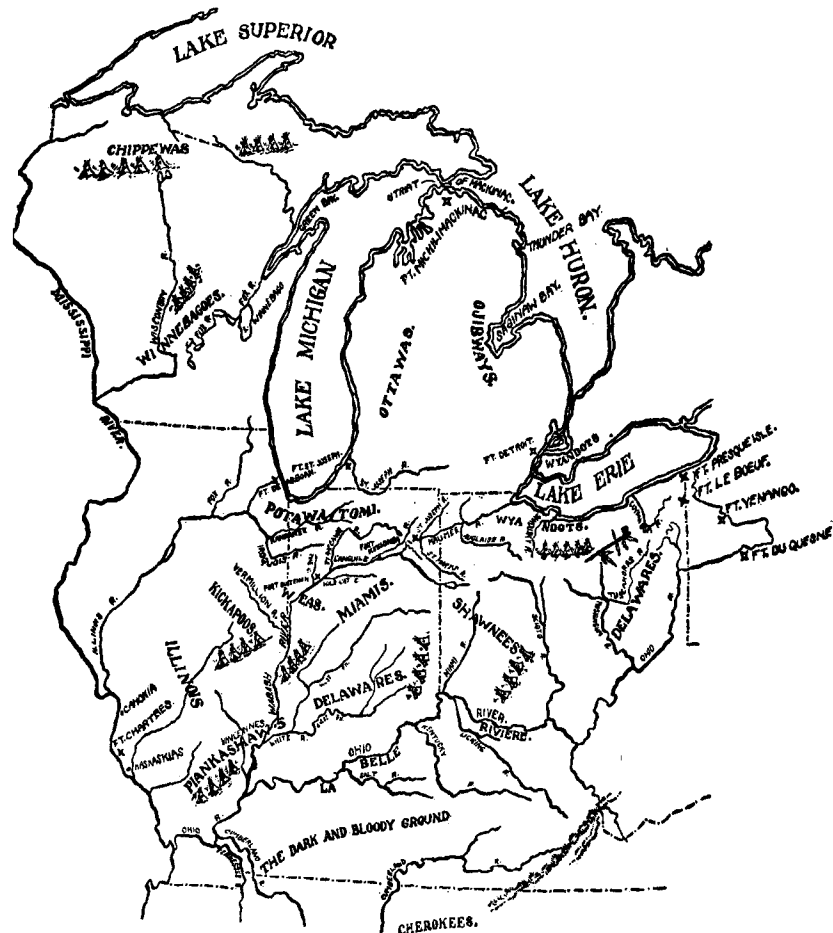
By ELMORE BARCE

Perhaps no country ever held forth greater allurements to savage huntsmen than the old territory of the northwest. Its rivers and lakes teemed with edible fish; its great forests abounded with deer, elk, bears and raccoons; its vast plains and prairies were filled with herds of buffalo that existed up almost to the close of the eighteenth century; every swamp and morass was filled with countless thousands of geese, ducks, swan and cranes, and rodents like the beaver and other animals furnished the red man with the warmest of raiment in the coldest winter. To give an idea of the vast wealth of this domain in fur-bearing animals alone, it may be taken into account that in the year 1818 the American Fur Company, under the control of John Jacob Astor, with its headquarters at Mackinaw, had in its employ about four hundred clerks and traders, together with about two thousand French-Canadian voyageurs, who roamed all the rivers and lakes of the Indian country from the British dominions on the north, to as far west as the Missouri river.<sup>1</sup> The "outfits" of this company had trading posts on the Illinois, and all its tributaries; on the Muskegon, Grand, Kalamazoo and other rivers in Michigan; on the line of the old Pottawatomie trail from the Wabash country to Post Chicago, and in the neighborhood of the Beaver lake regions in northern Indiana, and at many other points. The furs handled by them consisted of those of the marten (sable), mink, musk-rat, raccoon, lynx, wildcat, fox, wolverine, badger, otter, beaver, bears and deer,<sup>2</sup> of which the most valuable were those of the silver-gray fox and the marten. The value of these furs mounted into the hundreds of thousands of dollars and they were all consigned to New York. To one who reads the in-

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography of Gurdon S. Hubbard*, 15, 16, 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography of Gurdon S. Hubbard*, 17.

teresting sketches of Gurdon S. Hubbard relating to what may be termed as the finale or closing days of the fur trade of the old northwest, the vision of what this trade amounted to in the days of the old French and English traders at Montreal, Mackinaw and Detroit, before the country had been



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partially exhausted of its most valuable peltries, becomes more clearly strikingly apparent. Detroit commanded all the valuable beaver country of northern Ohio and Indiana, and southern Michigan, and of the rivers entering lakes Erie and Huron. The trade coming from the Cuyahoga, the Sandusky, the tributaries of the Miami and Scioto, the Wabash and the Maumee, all centered here. The French traders did

a vast and flourishing business with the savages, trading them brandy, guns, ammunition, blankets, vermilion and worthless trinkets for furs of the highest value. The significance of the old trading posts at Miamitown (Fort Wayne), Petit Piconne (Tippecanoe),<sup>3</sup> Ouiatenon,<sup>4</sup> and Vincennes, as feeders for this Detroit market by way of the Wabash and Maumee valleys, is also made plain. A glimpse of the activities at Miamitown (Fort Wayne) in the winter of 1789-1790, while it was still under the domination of the British, shows the Miamis, Shawnees and Potawatomi coming in with otter, beaver, bear skins and other peltry,<sup>5</sup> the presence of a lot of unscrupulous, cheating French traders<sup>6</sup> who were generally drunk when assembled together, and who took every advantage of each other<sup>7</sup> and the destitute savages with whom they were trading. At that time French half-breeds and traders of the names of Jean Cannehou, Jacque Dumay, Jean Coustan and others were trading with the Indians at Petit Piconne<sup>8</sup> or Tippecanoe, and all this trade was routed through by way of the Wabash, the portage at Miamitown, and the Maumee, to Detroit. The traders at Ouiatenon, who undoubtedly enjoyed the advantage of the Beaver lake trade, by way of the Potawatomi trail to the north, were also in direct communication with the merchants of Detroit, and depended upon them.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to observe in passing, that the rendezvous of the French traders at the Petit Piconne (termed by Gen. Charles Scott as Keth-tip-e-ca-nunk), was broken up by a detachment of Kentucky mounted volunteers under Gen. James Wilkinson, in the summer of 1791, and utterly destroyed. One who accompanied the expedition stated that there were then one hundred and twenty houses at this place, eighty of which were shingled; that the best houses belonged to the French traders, and that the gardens and improvements around the place

<sup>3</sup> A narrative of Life on the Old Frontier, Hay's Journal, *Wisconsin Historical Society*, 1914, pages 230-231 note.

<sup>4</sup> Esarey, *History of Indiana*, 20-21.

<sup>5</sup> A Narrative of Life on the Old Frontier, Hay's Journal, *Wisconsin Historical Society*, 1914. Pages 228, 241, 244, 246.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* 224.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* 237.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* 237.

<sup>9</sup> Dillon, *History of Indiana*, I, 286.

were delightful; that there was a tavern located there, with cellars, a bar, and public and private rooms.<sup>10</sup>

Of all the fur-bearers of the northwest, the most interesting were the beavers. How much these industrious gnawers had to do with the French and Indian war, and the rivalry between England and France for the control of their domain north of the Ohio, is not generally appreciated. Had it not been for the lucrative trade in beaver skins, England would not have so long held the military posts in the northwest after the Revolution. The marshes, lakes, rivers and small streams of northern Ohio and Indiana, and of the whole of Michigan and Wisconsin, abounded with the houses and habitations of these workers. Behind them they have left the names of creeks, towns, townships and even counties. The beaver lake region of northern Indiana has a Beaver "lake", a Beaver "township", a Beaver "creek", a Beaver "city", and a Beaverville to its credit. The history of Vigo and Parke counties, Indiana, by Beckwith, chapter 20, at page 208, recites that beavers existed along all the small lakes and lesser river courses in northern Indiana. They were plentiful in Dekalb,<sup>11</sup> Marshall,<sup>12</sup> Elkhart,<sup>13</sup> Cass,<sup>14</sup> White<sup>15</sup> and Steuben.<sup>16</sup> It is well known that their dams existed in large numbers in Newton and Jasper, and in practically all the Indiana counties north of the Wabash river. So numerous were these animals that even the most intelligent among the early savages believed that the great flocks of geese in the fall in many instances turned into beavers, and for proof of the foundation for this belief, they pointed to the palmated hind feet.<sup>17</sup> In no other way could they account for their seemingly inexhaustible supply. Most of the small rivers and streams were very low in the summer season. To provide against this extremity, and to promote both their food supply and their safety, the beavers constructed their dams. The

<sup>10</sup> James R. Albach, *Annals of the West*, 569.

<sup>11</sup> *History DeKalb County, Ind.*, B. F. Bowen, 139-140.

<sup>12</sup> *Marshall County History*, McDonald, I, 160.

<sup>13</sup> *Standard History of Elkhart County*, Abraham E. Weaver, I, 33-39.

<sup>14</sup> *Cass County History*, John Powell, I, 481.

<sup>15</sup> *White County History*, W. H. Hammelle, I, 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Chicago Publication of Steuben County, Indiana*, 264.

<sup>17</sup> *Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Colonel James Smith*, Lexington, 1799. Republished by Clarke & Co., 57-58.

convexity of these structures pointed upstream in order to give added strength. By this method the water was raised over the entrances to their subterraneous lodging places under the banks, and the total water area extended to take in additional roots, trees and saplings for their subsistence.<sup>18</sup> The beaver, being a slow mover upon the land, often fell prey to the wolves, who were their greatest enemies. To the Indians, the beaver not only furnished furs and clothing, but in the winter season he also supplied them with flesh to eat. Col. James Smith describes the meat as being a "delicious fare."<sup>19</sup> When the Indians found the beavers in their houses they first broke up all the thin ice around about, and then by breaking into the houses, drove the beavers into the water. Being soon forced to come to the surface to take the air, the Indians commonly reached in and caught them by the hind legs, dragged them out on the ice and tomahawked them.<sup>20</sup> Great numbers of them were also caught in traps.

One of the great curses of the fur trade to the Indians, however, was the speedy extermination of their food supply. The Indian traders offered a blanket in place of the robes and furs formerly made and used by the savages, and what was still more destructive, constantly held before their eyes the allurements of whiskey and brandy. To procure these, the red men destroyed the herds of buffalo east of the Mississippi, despoiled the lakes and rivers of their swarms of beaver and otter, and suddenly found themselves both hungry and dependent in a land that formerly yielded an abundance of everything.

No story of the northwest would be complete without mention of the buffalo, or wild cow of America. In the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries the buffalo had ranged as far east as western New York and Pennsylvania, and as far south as Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia.<sup>21</sup> Father Marquette, in his explorations, declared that the prairies along the Illinois river were "covered with buffaloes."

<sup>18</sup> *Remarkable Occurrences*, etc., 59-60.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* 60-61.

<sup>21</sup> The Extermination of the American Bison, Wm. T. Hornaday, in *Annual Report of Smithsonian Institution*, 1887, Part 2, page 387.

Father Hennepin, in writing of northern Illinois, between Chicago and the Illinois river, asserted that, "There must be an innumerable quantity of wild bulls in that country, since the earth is covered with their horns. \* \* \* They follow one another, so that you may see a drove of them for above a league together. Their ways are beaten, as our great roads, and no herb grows therein."<sup>22</sup>

Of the presence of large numbers of buffalo, that resorted to the salty licks of Kentucky, we have frequent mention by both Marshall and Butler, the early historians of that state. In the year 1755, Col. James Smith mentions the killing of several buffalo by the Indians at a lick in Ohio, somewhere between the Muskingum, the Ohio and the Scioto. At this lick the Indians made about a half bushel of salt in their brass kettles. He asserts that about this lick there were clear, open woods, and that there were great roads leading to the same made by the buffalo, that appeared like wagon roads.<sup>23</sup> The wild cattle had evidently been attracted thither by the mineral salts in the water. In the early morning of June 13, 1765, George Croghan, an Indian agent of William Johnson, coming into view of some of the fine large meadows bordering the western banks of the Wabash, saw in the distance herds of buffalo eating the grass, and described the land as filled with buffalo, deer and bears in "great plenty".<sup>24</sup> On the eighteenth and nineteenth of the same month, he traveled through what he termed as a "prodigious large meadow, called the Pyankeshaw's Hunting Ground", and described it as well watered and full of buffalo, deer, bears and all kinds of wild game.<sup>25</sup> He was still in the lower Wabash region. On the twentieth and twenty-first of June he was traveling north along the Wabash in the vicinity of the Vermilion river, and states that game existed plentifully, and that one could kill in a half hour as much as was needed.<sup>26</sup> He spoke, evidently, of the large variety of game before mentioned. The whole of the grand prairie of Illinois, filled with an abundant growth of the richest grasses, and all the savannas north of the Wabash in Indiana, that really constituted an exten-

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*, 388.

<sup>23</sup> *Remarkable Occurrences*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Mann Butler, *History of Kentucky*, Louisville, 1834. Appendix, 371.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*, 372.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*, 372.

sion of this grand prairie, were particularly suited to the range of the wild herds, and were the last grounds deserted by them previous to their withdrawal west, and across the Mississippi.

The economical value of the herds of buffalo to the Indian tribes of the northwest may be gathered from the uses to which they were afterwards put by the tribes of the western plains.

The body of the buffalo yielded fresh meat, of which thousands of tons were consumed; dried meat, prepared in summer for winter use; pemmican (also prepared in summer) of meat, fat, and berries; tallow, made up into large balls or sacks, and kept in store; marrow, preserved in bladders; and tongues; dried and smoked, and eaten as a delicacy.

The skin of the buffalo yielded a robe, dressed with the hair on, for clothing and bedding; a hide, dressed without the hair, which made a tepee cover, when a number were sewn together; boats, when sewn together in the green state, over a wooden frame work; shields, from the thickest portions, as rawhide; ropes, made up as rawhide; clothing of many kinds; bags for use in traveling; coffins, or winding sheets for the dead, etc.

Other portions utilized were sinews, which furnished fibre for ropes, thread, bow-strings, snow-shoe webs, etc.; hair, which was sometimes made into belts and ornaments; "buffalo chips" which formed a valuable and highly prized fuel; bones, from which many articles of use and ornament were made; horns, which were made into spoons, drinking vessels, etc.<sup>27</sup>

The Rev. John Heckewelder, in speaking of the skill of the Delawares of Ohio in dressing and curing buffalo hides, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, says that they cured them so that they became quite soft and supple, and so that they would last for many years without wearing out. They also made beaver and raccoon skin blankets that were "pliant, warm and durable", setting the fur or hair all the same way so as to shed water.<sup>28</sup>

Taking into consideration the well-known fact that the prairies of Illinois and northern Indiana were filled with herds of buffalo in the middle of the eighteenth century, and

<sup>27</sup> The extermination of the American Bison, Wm. T. Hornaday, *Annual Report of Smithsonian Institution*, 1887, Part 2, pages 437-438.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. John Heckewelder, *An Account of the History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations*, Philadelphia, 1819, 202.

that about this time the tribes of the Sacs and Foxes, Kickapoos, and Potawatomi descended from the north and took possession of this buffalo country, we are able to understand how these well nourished, prolific and virile horse tribes, more especially the Potawatomi, were able to push back and finally seize and occupy a large part of the country of the Miamis.

All at once, and somewhere between the years 1780 and 1790, the buffalo east of the Mississippi, suddenly disappeared. The account given by Shaubena, a famous Potawatomi chief of northern Illinois, is interesting. He says that the trade in buffalo robes east of the Mississippi ceased in about the year 1790; that when a youth he joined in the chase of buffalo on the prairies, but while he was still young they all disappeared from the country.

A big snow, about five feet deep, fell, and froze so hard on the top that people walked on it, causing the buffalo to perish by starvation. Next spring, a few buffalo, poor and haggard in appearance, were seen going westward, and as they approached the carcasses of dead ones, which were lying here and there on the prairie, they would stop, commence pawing and lowing, then start off again in a lope for the west.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever credence may be given to the above tale, it is interesting to observe that the Rev. John Heckewelder relates, that the winter of the year 1784 was of such intense cold, as that all the rivers and creeks within the present limits of the state of Michigan, and also Lake St. Clair, became covered with a coat of ice, that from day to day became thicker and stronger; that this intense freezing was followed by a snow fall of two feet in depth, followed a few days later by another snow of three feet, so that the whole surface of the country was covered to a level of about five feet; that from the beginning of January until about the first of March, there were not more than four clear days; that during that time the snow became settled, and a hard crust formed on the top, so that persons could walk upon it.<sup>30</sup> Barring a discrepancy in dates, the winter referred to by the chief

<sup>29</sup> M. Matson, *Memories of Shaubena*, Chicago, 1878, 34-35.

<sup>30</sup> John Heckewelder, *Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren*, Philadelphia, 1820, 352, 355-356.

Shaubena and the missionary Heckewelder, were probably the same. The prevalence of such a depth of snow for such an extended time would certainly lead to the starvation of thousands of these animals. William T. Hornaday, of the Smithsonian Institution, says:

When the snowfall was unusually heavy, and lay for a long time on the ground, the buffalo was forced to fast for days together, and sometimes even weeks. If a warm day came, and thawed the upper surface of the snow, sufficiently for succeeding cold to freeze it into a crust, the outlook for the bison began to be serious. A man can travel over a crust through which the hoofs of a ponderous bison cut like chisels and leave him floundering belly-deep. It was at such times that the Indians hunted him on snow-shoes, and drove their spears into his vitals as he wallowed helplessly in the drifts. Then the wolves grew fat upon the victims which they, also, slaughtered without effort.<sup>31</sup>

The extinction of this valuable animal east of the Mississippi may more reasonably be ascribed to a combination of causes. First, the careless slaughter of thousands of them by the Potawatomi, Kickapoos and Sacs and Foxes, for their hides alone, in order to procure whiskey from the reckless French fur traders. Second, the useless slaughter of other thousands of them under the excitement of the chase, regardless of any idea of conserving the herds. Third, the slaughter of great numbers by ever increasing bands of white hunters. If after the herds had been thus depleted by years of reckless killing, the great snow came that covered the prairies with a solid crust for long weeks and months, and during this time other thousands fell victims to starvation, wolves, and Indians upon snow-shoes, the remnants of the herds that remained in the spring may well have fled beyond the Mississippi in quest of a more temperate climate.

However that may be, the opening of the nineteenth century saw the buffalo practically extinguished in the territory of the northwest. A few scattered animals may have remained here and there upon the prairies, but the old herds whose progenitors were seen by Croghan were forever gone. In the month of December, 1799, Judge Jacob Burnet was traveling overland on horseback from Cincinnati to Vin-

<sup>31</sup> The extermination of the American Bison, 423.

cennes on professional business, and while at some point north and west of the falls of the Ohio he and his companions surprised a small herd of eight or ten buffaloes, that were seeking shelter behind the top of a fallen beech tree on the line of an old "trace", during a snow storm.<sup>32</sup> This is one of the last authentic accounts given of any buffaloes in Indiana. On August 18th and August 27th, 1804, Governor William Henry Harrison, as Indian agent for the United States government, bought a large tract of land in southern Indiana, between the Wabash and Ohio rivers, from the Delaware and Piankeshaw tribes. The right to make this purchase was disputed by Captain William Wells, the Indian agent at Fort Wayne, and by the Little Turtle claiming to represent the Miamis, and it was asserted among other things, that the lands bought were frequented as a hunting ground by both the Miamis and Potawatomi, and that they went there to hunt buffaloes. The truth of this statement was denied by Governor Harrison, who said that not an animal of that kind "had been seen within that tract for several years."<sup>33</sup> It seems probable, then, that the account given by Shaubena that all traffic in buffalo robes ceased by the year 1790 is true; that at the opening of the nineteenth century the herds in Indiana and Illinois had entirely disappeared, and that if a few stragglers were still left in the remote regions of the grand prairie, that they were of no commercial value whatever to the tribes east of the Mississippi.

Traces of the old buffalo wallows are occasionally met with even to this day. The great animals "rolled successively in the same hole, and each thus carried away a coat of mud," which baking in the sun, served to protect them against the great swarm of flies, gnats and insects that infested the marshes and prairies of that early time. One of these wallows, in a perfect state of preservation, exists in the northwest quarter of section thirty, in township twenty-five north, range six west, in Benton county, Indiana. It is several yards in diameter, hollowed out to a depth of four or five feet, and its periphery is almost an exact circle. It

<sup>32</sup> Burnett, *Notes on the Northwestern Territory*, Cincinnati, 1847, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Letter by Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, March 3rd, 1805, Harrison Letters, 109 to 123, inclusive, State University.

is situate on rather a high, springy knoll, commanding a view of the surrounding plain for several miles. A great number of Indian arrow heads have been picked up in the immediate vicinity, showing that the Indians had previously resorted thither in search of game.

The geographical features of the northwest were such that all points in the interior were easily accessible to the early voyageurs and French fur traders. It was bounded on the north and northeast by the chain of the Great Lakes, on the south by the Ohio, and on the west by the Mississippi. The heads of the rivers and streams that flowed into these great watercourses and lakes were connected by short portages, so that the Indian trapper or hunter could carry his canoe for a few miles and pass from the waters that led to Lake Michigan or Lake Erie, into the streams that fed the Mississippi or the Ohio. Take, for instance, the rivers within the present limits of the state of Ohio. The headwaters of the Muskingum and its tributaries interlocked with those of the Cuyahoga; the headwaters of the Scioto with those of the Sandusky; the headwaters of the Great Miami with those of the Wabash and the St. Marys. In northern Indiana another remarkable system of portages appeared. The canoes of the traders were carried some eight or nine miles from the Little Wabash to the Maumee, placing the command of the whole Wabash country in the hands of the Detroit merchants. The sources of the Tippecanoe were connected by portages with the waters of the St. Joseph of Lake Michigan, and a like connection existed between the waters of the Tippecanoe and the waters of the Kankakee. These portages were, as General Harrison observes, "much used by the Indians and sometimes by traders."<sup>34</sup> Hence the importance of the trading posts at Tippecanoe and the Wea towns, or Ouiatenon. La Salle passed from Lake Michigan to the waters of the St. Joseph, thence up that river to a portage of three miles in what is now St. Joseph county, Indiana, thence by said portage to the headwaters of the Kankakee, and down that river to the Illinois.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Letter by Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, July 5th, 1809, Harrison Letters, 252 to 263, inclusive, State University.

<sup>35</sup> James R. Albach, *Annals of the West*, 80.

At Post Chicago the traders crossed from Lake Michigan by a very short portage into the headwaters of the Illinois, and General Harrison says that in the spring, the boats with their loading "passed freely from one to the other".<sup>36</sup> In Michigan the heads of the streams that flowed into Lake Huron interlocked with the heads of those that went down to Lake Michigan. In Wisconsin, the voyageurs passed from Green bay up the Fox river to lake Winnebago, thence by the Fox again to the portage between the Fox and Wisconsin, thence down the Wisconsin river to the Mississippi. Through this important channel of trade passed nine-tenths of the goods that supplied the Indians above the Illinois river and those in upper Louisiana.<sup>37</sup>

This great network of lakes, rivers and portages was in turn connected by the waterways of the Ottawa and the St. Lawrence, with the great head and center of all the fur trade of the western world, the city of Montreal.

The only practicable means of communication was by the canoe. Most of the territory of the northwest, being as General Harrison observes, "remarkably flat, the roads were necessarily bad in winter, and in the summer the immense prairies to the west and north of this produced such a multitude of flies as to render it impossible to make use of pack horses."<sup>38</sup> Bogs, marshes and sloughs in endless number added to the difficulties of travel. Hence it was, that the power that commanded the lakes and water courses of the northwest, commanded at the same time all the fur trade and the Indian tribes in the interior. The mastery of this situation constituted the gage of battle between France and England during the French and Indian war, and was afterwards the bone of contention between Great Britain and her former colonies.

To give a detailed description of the many beautiful rivers, valleys and forests of the northwest of the opening of the last century, would be almost impossible. It was a vast domain, well watered and fertile, and containing some

<sup>36</sup> Letter by Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, July 5th, 1809, Harrison Letters, 252 to 263, inclusive, State University.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*, 252 to 263, inclusive.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*, 252 to 263, inclusive.

of the best lands in the possession of the federal government. Two rivers, however, assume such historical importance, as to merit a more particular mention. Along their courses two Indian confederacies were organized, under the spur of British influence, to oppose the advance of the infant republic of the United States. These two rivers were the Wabash and the Maumee.

The valley of the Wabash, famed in song and story, and rich in Indian legend, is now filled with fields of corn and prosperous cities. At the opening of the year 1800, it swept through an unbroken wilderness of oak, maple and sycamore from its source to the old French settlement of Vincennes. Its bluffs, now adorned with the habitations of a peaceful people, then presented the wild and rugged beauty of pristine days; its terraces, stretching back to the prairies of the north and west, were crowned with forests primeval; while naked Miamis, Weas and Potawatomi in canoes of bark, rounded its graceful courses to the waters of the Ohio.

For one who has ridden over the hills to the west and south of Purdue University, and viewed the gorgeous panorama of the Wea plains, or who has glimpsed in the perspective the wooded hills of Warren and Vermilion from the bluffs on the eastern side of the river, it is not hard to understand why the red man loved the Wabash. An observer who saw it in the early part of the last century pens this picture:

Its green banks were lined with the richest verdure. Wild flowers intermingled with the tall grass that nodded in the passing breeze. Nature seemed clothed in her bridal robe. Blossoms of the wild plum, hawthorn, and red-bud made the air redolent.<sup>39</sup>

Speaking of the summer he says:

The wide fertile bottom lands of the Wabash, in many places presented one continuous orchard of wild-plum and crab-apple bushes, overspread with arbors of the different varieties of the woods grape, wild hops and honeysuckle, fantastically wreathed together. One bush, or cluster of bushes, often presenting the crimson plum, the yellow crab-apple, the blue luscious grape, festoons of matured wild hops, mingled with the red berries of the clambering sweet-brier, that bound them all lovingly together.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Sanford C. Cox, *Old Settlers*, 1860, 75.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*, 76.

Through all this wild and luxurious wilderness of vines, grasses and flowers flitted the honey bee, called by the Indians "the white man's fly," storing his golden burden in the hollow trunks of the trees. While on the march from Vincennes in the last days of September, 1811, Captain Spencer's Yellow Jackets found three bee trees in an hour and spent the evening in cutting them down. They were rewarded by a find of ten gallons of rich honey.<sup>41</sup>

The great river itself now passed between high precipitous bluffs, crowned with oak, sugar, walnut and hickory, or swept out with long graceful curves into the lowlands and bottoms, receiving at frequent intervals the waters of clear, sparkling springs and brooks that leaped down from rocky gorges and hill sides, or being joined by the currents of some creek or inlet that in its turn swept back through forest, glade and glen to sunlit groves and meadows of blue grass. Everywhere the waters of the great stream were clear and pellucid. The plow-share of civilization had not as yet turned up the earth, nor the filth and sewerage of cities been discharged into the current. In places the gravelly bottom could be seen at a great depth and the forms of fishes of great size reposing at ease.

Schools of fishes—salmon, bass, red-horse and pike—swam close along the shore, catching at the blossoms of the red-bud and plum that floated on the surface of the water, which was so clear that myriads of the finny tribe could be seen darting hither and thither amidst the limpid element, turning up their silvery sides as they sped out into deeper water.<sup>42</sup>

The whole valley of the Wabash abounded with deer, and their tiny hoofs wrought footpaths through every hollow and glen. The small prairies bordered with shady groves, the patches of blue grass, and the sweet water of the springs, were great attractions. The banks of the Mississinewa, Wild Cat, Pine Creek, Vermilion, and other tributaries, were formerly noted hunting grounds. George Croghan, who described the Wabash as running through "one of the finest countries in the world," mentions the deer as existing in

<sup>41</sup> Tipton's Journal, *Indiana Magazine of History*, II, 172.

<sup>42</sup> Sanford C. Cox, *Old Settlers*, 76.

great numbers. On the march of General Harrison's men to Tippecanoe, the killing of deer was an everyday occurrence, and at times the frightened animals passed directly in front of the line of march.<sup>43</sup> Raccoons were also very plentiful. On a fur trading expedition conducted by a French trader named La Fountain from the old Miamitown (Fort Wayne), in the winter of 1789-90, he succeeded in picking up about eighty deer skins and about five hundred raccoon skins in less than thirty days. He descended the Wabash and "turned into the woods" towards the White river, there bartering with the Indians for their peltries.<sup>44</sup>

As to wild game, the whole valley was abundantly supplied. In the spring time, great numbers of wild ducks, geese and brant were found in all the ponds and marshes; in the woody grounds, the wild turkey, the pheasant and the quail. At times, the sun was actually darkened by the flight of wild pigeons, while the prairie chicken was found in all the open tracts and grass lands.

The bottom lands of this river were noted for their fertility. The annual inundations always left a rich deposit of silt. This silt produced excellent maize, potatoes, beans, pumpkins, squashes, cucumbers and melons. These, according to Heckewelder, were important items of the Indian food supply.<sup>45</sup>

To the Indian we are indebted for ash-cake, hoe-cake, succotash, samp, hominy, and many other preparations made from this Indian maize.<sup>46</sup> The Miamis of the Wabash, with a favorable climate and a superior soil, produced a famous corn with a finer skin and "a meal much whiter" than that raised by other tribes.<sup>47</sup> How far the cultivation of this cereal had progressed is not now fully appreciated. In the expedition of Gen. James Wilkinson against the Wabash Indians in 1791, he is said to have destroyed over two hundred acres of corn in the milk at Kenapacomaqua, or the Eel

<sup>43</sup> See Tipton's Journal, *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 2.

<sup>44</sup> A Narrative of Life on the Old Frontier, Hay's Journal, *Wisconsin Historical Society*, 243-244.

<sup>45</sup> Rev. John Heckewelder, *An Account of the History, etc., of the Indian Nations*. Philadelphia, 1819, 193.

<sup>46</sup> Bureau of American Ethnology. *Handbook of American Indians*. Part I, 791.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*, 853.

river towns, alone, and to have cut down a total of four hundred and thirty acres of corn in the whole campaign.<sup>48</sup> On the next day after the battle of Tippecanoe the dragoons of Harrison's army set fire to the Prophet's Town, and burned it to the ground. Judge Isaac Naylor says that they found there large quantities of corn, beans and peas,<sup>49</sup> and Gen. John Tipton relates that the commissary loaded six wagons with corn and "Burnt what was Estimated at 2 Thousand Bushels."<sup>50</sup>

Of the many other natural advantages of this great valley, much might be written. Wheat and tobacco, the latter of a fine grade, were growing at Vincennes in 1765, when Croghan passed through there. Wild hemp was abundant on the lowlands. The delicious pecan flourished, and walnuts, hazelnuts and hickorynuts were found in great plenty. The sugar maple existed everywhere, and the Indians, who were the original maple sugar makers, of the world, made large quantities of this toothsome article. In addition to this the whole valley was filled with wild fruits and berries, such as blackberries, dewberries, raspberries, gooseberries, and the luscious wild strawberry, that grew everywhere in the open spaces and far out on the bordering prairies.

No less wonderful was the valley of the Maumee, directly on the great trade route between the Wabash and the Post of Detroit. Croghan, who was a judge of good land, and made careful observations, found the Ottawas and Wyandots here in 1765, the land of great richness, and game very plentiful. It was a region greatly beloved by the Indian tribes, and the scene after the Revolution, of many grand councils of the northwestern confederacy. In a letter of General Wayne, written in 1794, he asserts that

The margins of these beautiful rivers the Miamis of the Lake (Maumee), and the Au Glaize (a southern tributary), appear like one continued village for a number of miles, both above and below this place, Grand Glaize, nor have I ever before beheld such immense fields of corn in any part of America from Canada to Florida.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> James R. Albach, *Annals of the West*, 568, 570.

<sup>49</sup> *Report Tippecanoe Monument Commission*, 151.

<sup>50</sup> *Indiana Magazine of History*, II, 181.

<sup>51</sup> Bureau of American Ethnology. *Handbook of American Indians*. Part I, page 791.

The army spent many days after the battle of Fallen Timbers in the destruction of the fields of grain. One who marched with Wayne's army, in August of the above year, describes Indian corn fields for four or five miles in length along the Au Glaize, and estimated that there were one thousand acres of growing corn. The whole valley of the Maumee from its mouth to Fort Wayne, is described as being full of immense corn fields, large vegetable patches, and old apple trees, and it is related that Wayne's army, while constructing Fort Defiance for a period of eight days, "obtained their bread and vegetables from the corn fields and potato patches surrounding the fort."<sup>52</sup>

Such were the valleys of the Wabash and the Maumee, but what of the savages that dwelt therein? Despite the richness and fertility of the soil, the former abundance of game, and the luxuriousness of the vegetation, the bands of Piankeshaws, Weas and Eel River Miamis, which Harrison saw in the vicinity of Vincennes in the year 1801, are described as "a body of the most depraved wretches upon earth."<sup>53</sup> They were seen in the streets of that town daily in considerable numbers; thirty or forty of them being frequently drunk at one time, drawing their knives and stabbing one another, and creating "the greatest disorders." They frequently broke open the houses of the citizens, killing their cattle and hogs, and breaking down their fences.<sup>54</sup> Under the influence of intoxicants they were seized with a spirit of insubordination and destroyed many of their own chiefs. The Little Beaver, a Wea chieftain, was murdered by his own son. Little Fox was killed in the street at mid-day, by one of his own nation.<sup>55</sup> The Kaskaskias of Illinois, once a powerful tribe, were reduced to a pack of beggars, supplicating the inhabitants of the old French towns on the Mississippi. The Piankeshaws were reduced to a miserable remnant of twenty-five or thirty warriors.<sup>56</sup> Farther up the

<sup>52</sup> Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, 1856, 523.

<sup>53</sup> Letter of Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, July 15, 1801, Dawson's *Harrison*, 9-12.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*, 9-12.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*, 9-12.

<sup>56</sup> Letter of Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, February 26, 1802. Dawson's *Harrison*, 16-20.

river, the tale was the same. The once powerful Miamis, visited by Mr. Gist in 1751, and described by him as "a very superior people", and in the days of Anthony Wayne numbered among the leaders of the northwestern confederacy, were reduced and decimated to scattered bands, that were daily yielding their grounds to more powerful tribes.

What was the cause of this sudden and terrible degeneration of the Indian tribes at the opening of the nineteenth century? It was plainly their contact with the Indian traders, the worst and most vicious element of the early frontier, and described by Harrison as being "the greatest villains in the world."<sup>57</sup> Long intercourse with these unscrupulous men, under the French, English and Americans, had finally accomplished a deterioration of the race. These traders had pandered to every vice and bowed to every passion of their savage victims, and all from the sordid motive of gain. The richest peltries were bartered for whiskey; the plains and rivers were robbed of their fur-bearing and food-producing animals. In 1801 the spectacle was appalling! It was believed that at that time not more than six hundred warriors were left upon the Wabash, and yet it was estimated that the quantity of liquor imported for their consumption was six thousand gallons.<sup>58</sup> The closer the contact of trader and savage, the more noticeable the effects.

All horrors are produced to those unhappy people by their too frequent intercourse with the white people. This is so certain, that I can at once tell, upon looking at an Indian whom I chance to meet, whether he belongs to a neighboring, or to a more distant tribe. The latter is generally well clothed, healthy, and vigorous; the former, half naked, filthy, and enfeebled by intoxication; and many of them without arms, excepting a knife, which they carry for the most villainous purposes.<sup>59</sup>

Along the great trade routes from Detroit to Vincennes, frequented for many decades by the voyageurs and traders of both those posts, the results were calamitous.

Let another fact be noticed. In the succeeding years of

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*, 16-20.

<sup>58</sup> Letter of Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, July 15, 1801. Dawson's *Harrison*, 9-12.

<sup>59</sup> Letter of Wm. H. Harrison to Secretary of War, July 15, 1801. Dawson's *Harrison*, 9-12.

General Harrison's administration, yearly complaint was made by the Indians of the scarcity of game. It is true that the great herds of buffalo had disappeared, and fearful havoc had been wrought among the swarms of beaver and otter, but if the tribes had not been weakened and diseased by the constant use of liquor, much of their misery might have been averted, and the natural bounties of their habitations would have still yielded them an abundant supply of food. As it was, great portions of the race were enervated, and became more and more dependent as their vices progressed. And along with this inordinate use of liquors, other perils had come. Hecklewelder noticed among the Ohio Delawares, a terrible increase in pulmonary diseases, as a result of the use of spirituous liquors. "Our vices have destroyed them more than our swords."<sup>60</sup> Ardent spirits in turn propagated certain blood diseases; the currents of the race became corrupted, and great numbers perished.<sup>61</sup>

Let it not be understood, however, that the glory and courage of all the tribesmen had entirely departed. Far from it. Despite the depravity spread by the traders, the innate ferocity of these wild men, their discipline in battle, and their knowledge of woodcraft, still made them a formidable foe. Given the right leaders, who could powerfully appeal to their superstitions and their ancient hatred of the pale-face, and they still possessed enough of potency to resist strong armies, and to strike terror to the hearts of the rugged frontiersmen.

<sup>60</sup> Rev. John Hecklewelder, *An Account of the History, etc., of the Indian Nations*, 223.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*, 221.

(To be Continued.)