

Nicolas Perrot, "Memoir on the Manners, Customs, and Religion of the Savages of North America," in *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, ed. Emma Helen Blair (2 vols., Lincoln, 1911). I, 121–25.

## V. Hunting the buffalo

I have already remarked that the savages of the prairies live in a happy land, on account of the great numbers of animals of all kinds that they have about them, and the grains, fruits, and roots which the soil there produces in abundance; but I have said nothing of the customs which they practice in their hunting expeditions or of the manner in which they pursue the chase, especially that of the buffalo. The savages set out in the autumn, after they have gathered the harvest, to go hunting; and they do not return to their villages until the month of March, in order to plant the grain on their lands. As soon as this is done, they go hunting again, and do not return until the month of July, which is the time when the rutting season of the buffalo begins. The people of an entire village go together to this hunting, and, if there are not enough of them, they unite with those of another village, and that for two reasons: the first, in order to defend themselves against the attacks which their enemies might make against them; and the other, that thus they may be able to drive in a greater number of animals. They assemble at nightfall on the eve of their departure, and choose among their number the man whom they consider most capable of being the director of the expedition. This is usually one of the more prominent war chiefs; he takes for adjutants all the other chiefs, and agrees with them on all the rules that should be laid down for the procedure that they must observe in order to hunt the buffaloes. On the same day, one of the leading men makes a harangue before all the assembly, in which he makes known the orders that have been issued in regard to the limits which shall be observed in this hunt, and the punishments ordained for those persons who overstep them. He declares that these orders provide for depriving the disobedient of their weapons, breaking their bows and arrows, tearing down their cabins, and plundering them of property found therein; and this law is inexorable among them. The reason which obliges them to employ so much severity and strictness against those who fail to obey the rule is, that if any of them during the hunt were to pass beyond the prescribed limits all the game would escape them by flight, and the village would be in danger of perishing from hunger. All the chiefs are generally subject to this law; and even if he who is [appointed] over all the rest should commit this fault, he would be punished with the same rigor as any other man, without regard to his authority. In case he refused to submit to it, all the young men—who are, so to speak, his property—would unite against him, and lay violent hands on all persons who should come forward to take his part. This headman of the chiefs, with his adjutants, forms the necessary detachments to go out scouting on the [various] routes; and if these men suspect that there is any danger for their people they come back over their path in order to cover their tracks and to prevent any attack by the enemy. When the village has a large number of young men able to bear arms they divide these into three bodies: one takes its route to the right, another that to the left, and half of the third party is

divided between the two former ones. One of these latter parties goes away [from its main column] a league or thereabout to the right, and the other remains on the left, both parties forming, each on its own side, a long file ; then they set out, in single file, and continue their march until they judge that their line of men is sufficiently long for them to advance into the depths [of the forest]. As they begin their march at midnight, one of the parties waits until dawn, while the others pursue their way; and after they have marched a league or more another party waits again for daylight; the rest march [until] after another half-league has been covered, and likewise wait. When the day has at last begun, this third party which had separated to the right and the left with the two others pushes its way farther; and as soon as the rising sun has dried off the dew on the ground, the parties on the right and the left, being in sight of each other, come together in [one] file, and close up the end of the circuit which they intend to surround. They commence at once by setting fire to the dried herbage which is abundant in those prairies; those who occupy the flanks do the same ; and at that moment the entire village breaks camp, with all the old men and young boys -who divide themselves equally on both sides, move away to a distance, and keep the hunting parties in sight so that they can act with the latter, so that the fires can be lighted on all four sides at once and gradually communicate the flames from one to another. That produces the same effect to the sight as four ranks of palisades, in which the buffaloes are enclosed. When the savages see that the animals are trying to get outside of it, in order to escape the fires which surround them on all sides (and this is the one thing in the world which they most fear), they run at them and compel them to reenter the enclosure ; and they avail themselves of this method to kill all the beasts. It is asserted that there are some villages which have secured as many as fifteen hundred buffaloes, and others more or fewer, according to the number of men in each and the size of the enclosure which they make in their hunting. For that country is nothing but plains, except only some small islands, to which they are accustomed to go and encamp for the purpose of drying their store of meat. The elk and the deer are quite often caught in these circles of fire, but make their escape; and the savages the party. usually follow up only those animals that they are certain of killing or of capturing by surprise. The people of the village then encamp in the place [that they find] most convenient, and nearest to the scene of the carnage. This camp being established, the game is divided among the families, each receiving what its hunters have slain ; some have more and others less, according to the number of men in each ; but the whole is distributed by the decisions of the chiefs, with great equity and justice. Each of these families strips the hides from the animals that fall to its share, and the people remain in the camp until all their store of meat is thoroughly dried. They are very careful to gnaw the bones of the animals so clean that no meat whatever is left on them. They finish [skinning the game] before noon, and the rest of the day is sufficient for preparing the meat [for drying]. The Illinois and their neighbors have no lack of wood for drying their meat; but the Ayoies and the Panys generally use only the well-dried dung of the buffaloes, as wood is extremely scarce among them. Thus you see how these tribes carry on their hunting expeditions, and they are always ready and able to defend their families against their enemies; for the families are always, on the march, placed on the flanks, which are

protected on the right and the left by the warriors, and sheltered from the attacks that might be made on them. Besides that, there is nothing to fear behind them, for the men sent out to reconnoiter defend them at the rear, and on such occasions serve them as a rear-guard. It is impossible, therefore, for the enemy to appear without the entire troop knowing it, by means of the alarm-cry which each utters to the next one, and by the prompt assistance of the warriors, who immediately hasten to oppose the enemy. The women and children are out of danger; the warriors make a bold stand, and are very seldom driven back. In their winter hunts they follow the same rules; but the snow with which the ground is entirely covered prevents them from making the fires spread, and thus obtaining the same success as in other seasons of the year. As for their [hunting] laws, they are under the same obligation to observe them; but they are unavoidably compelled to arrange a much longer line of men to form the circuit with which it is necessary to surround the buffaloes. If any one of the animals finds an opening for forcing its way through them, they run to meet it to prevent its flight; or else they follow behind the game so swiftly that they always slay many of the beasts. It is only the skin on the bellies of the cows and that of the yearling calves which the savages use for making their garments; but the hides of the bulls are used for [making] bucklers, with which they ward off their enemies' arrows and the blows of clubs. When they wish to dress this hide, they cut off a sufficient piece of it, and, after thoroughly scraping both sides of it, they boil it a moment in water, and then take it out of the kettle. Then they stretch it on a hoop of the same size as the buckler that they intend to make, and when it is entirely dry it becomes as hard as the heavy leather used for the soles of shoes. When the savages wish to cut it for stretching, they take pains beforehand to make it as nearly round in shape as they can; and when it is quite dry they remove the superfluous leather attached to the hoop [on the outer edge]. In this manner they make the bucklers which they carry to war.