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Contributors

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THE CATLIN COLLECTION OF INDIAN PAINTINGS.*

By WASHINGTON MATTHEWS, M. D., LL. D., *Major and Surgeon, U. S. Army.*

The majority of my audience have, no doubt, been many times in this hall, either as attendants on the lectures which are delivered here, or as visitors to the Museum, and many times they have gazed on the array of paintings which cover its walls. To what extent have they observed these? What lessons have they learned from them? What opinions have they formed, what criticisms have they made of them? What do they know of their history or of the history of the wandering artist whose busy hand painted them? These are questions to which I can frame only imperfect answers. I have asked such questions of many who have visited this Museum, and I am led to believe that not more than one in ten bestows an inquiring glance at this monument to a life of laborious and enthusiastic devotion to a chosen subject; and vastly fewer are those who inquire into the nature and scope of the collection, or stop to discover the name and something of the personality of the author.

George Catlin was, to use his own expression, a lion in his day. He enacted in Europe fifty years ago much the same rôle that "Buffalo Bill" has played in our time, but in a more scholarly and less lucrative way. He was the genial showman of the American Indian and the wild West. He carried his collection—the very collection we see around us now—to various European capitals. He exhibited live Indians, and he and his protégés were received and entertained at the homes of English nobility. They dined with Louis Phillippe and with the King and Queen of Belgium. The following brief autobiography is taken from his work entitled "Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians."

"I was born in Wyoming, in North America, some thirty or forty years since (*i. e.*, in 1796), of parents who entered that beautiful and famed valley soon after the close of the revolutionary war, and the disastrous event of the "Indian massacre."

"The early part of my life was whiled away, apparently somewhat in vain, with books reluctantly held in one hand and a rifle or fishing pole firmly and affectionately grasped in the other.

"At the urgent request of my father, who was a practicing lawyer, I was prevailed upon to abandon these favorite themes and also my occasional dabbings with the

* Reprint of a lecture delivered in the lecture hall of the National Museum, Saturday, April 13, 1889.

brush, which had secured already a corner in my affections, and I commenced reading the law for a profession under the direction of Reeve and Gould, of Connecticut. I attended the lectures of these learned judges for two years—was admitted to the bar—and practiced the law as a sort of *Nimrodical* lawyer, in my native land, for the term of two or three years; when I very deliberately sold my law library and all (save my rifle and fishing tackle), and converting their proceeds into brushes and paint pots, I commenced the art of painting in Philadelphia, without teacher or adviser.

"I there closely applied my hand to the labors of the art for several years; during which time my mind was continually reaching for some branch or enterprise of the art on which to devote a whole lifetime of enthusiasm; when a delegation of some ten or fifteen noble and dignified-looking Indians, from the wilds of the "Far West," suddenly arrived in the city, arrayed and equipped in all their classic beauty,—with shield and helmet,—with tunic and manteau,—tinted and tasseled off, exactly for the painter's palette!

"In silent and stoic dignity these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictured robes, with their brows plumed with the quills of the war eagle, attracting the gaze and the admiration of all who beheld them. After this, they took their leave for Washington City, and I was left to reflect and regret, which I did long and deeply, until I came to the following deductions and conclusions:

"Black and blue cloth and civilization are destined, not only to veil, but to obliterate the grace and beauty of Nature. Man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by disguises of art, is surely the most beautiful model for the painter,—and the country from which he hails is unquestionably the best study or school of the arts in the world: such, I am sure, from the models I have seen, is the wilderness of North America. And the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian.

"There was something inexpressibly delightful in the above resolve, which was to bring me amidst living models for my brush: and at the same time to place in my hands again, for my living and protection, the objects of my heart, above named, which had long been laid by to rust and decay in the city, without the remotest prospect of again contributing to my amusement.

"I had fully resolved—I had opened my views to my friends and relations, but got not one advocate or abettor. I tried fairly and faithfully, but it was in vain to reason with those whose anxieties were ready to fabricate every difficulty and danger that could be imagined, without being able to understand or appreciate the extent or importance of my designs, and I broke from them all,—from my wife and my aged parents,—myself my only adviser and protector."

Such is Catlin's own rather flowery account of how he formed his resolution; but the language in which he expresses it is only an evidence of the reality of his enthusiasm.

These paintings as works of art I now often hear unfavorably criticised; but criticism is an easy task for those who do not appreciate the difficulties under which Catlin labored. To-day our land is filled with artists of both sexes, of all ages, and of every degree of fitness and unfitness. The number of amateur aspirants in art has increased an hundred fold in the last half century.

To accommodate this growth of artistic demand, the conveniences and appliances of art have improved and increased. The well equipped sketcher in oil of to-day can not appreciate the difficulties of the traveling artist in America fifty or sixty years ago. There were then no paten

sketching boxes, with their complication of conveniences. The compressible metallic tube had not been invented, or at least not introduced into the armamentarium of art. Not one-fourth of the present tints of Winsor and Newton's catalogue were then known. Rapidly drying vehicles were not in vogue. The artist ground his own paints—coarse, crude paints—and carried them around mixed in pots or dry in paper. I do not think that a careful analysis of Catlin's paintings will reveal more than a dozen pigments; I have reference to the paintings which were taken, so to speak, on the wing. He had not accommodations for more. While collecting a large number of these views, he was traveling with two other men in a small canoe, which, in addition to his paints and canvas, held their clothing, bedding, ammunition and provisions; in fact, everything necessary for life and comfort in a land inhabited only by savages. Ethnographic travelers of to day, with pocket camera and instantaneous dry-plates, have a vast advantage over Catlin with his red lead—which he used liberally—his boiled oil and his rolled canvas; but their results are not correspondingly more accurate. Many of his sketches, too, were necessarily taken in great haste. Yet he never failed to catch the spirit of the scene before him and to transfer it faithfully to his canvas. But, while making all just excuses for Catlin, it must be acknowledged that he was not acquainted with all the resources of his art as it existed even in his day. He was a self-taught man.

From my own experience, following, as I have done for years, in the very trail of Catlin, I can not speak too highly of his general truthfulness; yet he suffered from certain limitations of his time and surroundings which have impaired the usefulness of his literary work. Without telling any direct falsehood, he succeeds sometimes in deceiving the reader. His books must be read critically; they are not of equal use to all students. In this year of our Lord there are so many workers in all specialties, and the facilities for publication in each are so great, that one may write on the driest and most technical subjects, in the least interesting manner, and yet be reasonably certain of finding a publisher and a coterie of readers. It was not thus in America fifty years ago, and Catlin, who was a poor man, in order to make his enterprise pay, had to write for a general public, whom he felt obliged to interest as well as instruct. He sometimes painted also with this intent, as will be shown later. Indeed, he thus candidly criticises himself in one of his letters:

"It would be impossible at the same time, in a book of these dimensions, to explain all the manners and customs of these people; but as far as they are narrated, they have been described by my pen, upon the spot, as I have seen them transacted; and if some few of my narrations should seem a *little too highly colored*, I trust the world will be ready to extend to me that pardon which it is customary to yield to all artists whose main faults exist in the vividness of their coloring rather than in the drawing of their pictures; but there is nothing else in them, I think, that I should ask pardon for, even though some of them should stagger credulity and incur for me the censure of critics."

But the question of too high coloring is often one of personal equation only. One of our greatest modern writers thus defends himself against the charge of exaggeration:

"What is exaggeration to one class of minds and perception is plain truth to another. That which is commonly called long-sight, perceives in a prospect innumerable features and bearings non-existent to a short-sighted person. I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is *always* the writer who colors highly or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for color is a little dull."

Half a century ago the country west of the Mississippi was a veritable *terra incognita*. No one appreciated the magnificent distances of that region. The Rocky Mountains were supposed to be somewhat in sight of the falls of St. Anthony. I remember once seeing in a novel written by an author who, I believe, is still living, an account in which the hero is represented as ascending to the roof of a one-story structure on the banks of the Illinois River, and looking admiringly over an extensive landscape which was "bounded on the west by the distant outline of the Rocky Mountains." In other words, this gentleman of telescopic eye was able to take in the entire states of Missouri and Kansas and half of Colorado at a single glance. With such ideas prevailing among the learned, how could Catlin, having journeyed some three thousand miles up the Missouri, come back with his finger in his mouth and say he had not had a glimpse of the Rocky Mountains? No one would believe him. He must at least pretend he had seen them, and so by an ingenious verbal fabrication,* but without the slightest direct falsehood, he makes possible the inference that he saw their snowy summits during his journey up the Missouri River in 1832. So well does he succeed that a recent student of Catlin, in a published map, terminates the itinerary of 1832 some hundreds of miles west of the mouth of the Yellowstone, which latter was really his farthest west during the year in question.

I have not time now to explain in full my reasons for knowing that Catlin did not see the Rocky Mountains in 1832, as he leads many to suppose he has done; but if there is any one in the audience conversant with Catlin's works, who wishes to have the proofs on this point, I am at his service. Not only did Catlin not see the "Rockies" in 1832, but I have serious doubt if he saw the main chain at any time during the eight years or more during which he was engaged in making this Gallery. What he may have seen and sketched after 1852, when the Gallery passed into other hands, I do not know; but then the California gold fields had been discovered, the overland route was trodden as clear as a thrashing-floor, and the visit to the Rocky Mountains had become a common achievement. One of the reasons for my doubts is the evidence of the collection itself. Examine all these pictures carefully by

*See "Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians," by Geo. Catlin, vol. 1, London, 1866, pp. 63-65. The conversation with "Batiste" here given is fictitious.

daylight, and you will see that the artist well appreciated the distinctive beauties of different landscapes—the odd, the peculiar, the striking. There is not a remarkable scene on the Upper Missouri from the Platte to the Yellowstone that he has not transferred to his canvas. To the beauties of the Upper Mississippi he has done a justice which Banvard did not excel. If he has worked so faithfully on these beautiful but comparatively tame landscapes, how would the infinitely grander scenes of the Rocky Mountains have inspired him? Could he have held his brush still in sight of them? Yet no view of that vast mountain region is to be found in his collection, with the possible exception of some ridges seen from the Comanche camp in 1834, which may have been outlying spurs of the Sierra Madre. Pike's Tent, an odd and beautiful but comparatively insignificant bluff, some five hundred feet high, on the upper Mississippi, has a canvas allotted to it in the Gallery, but for a view of Pike's Peak, fourteen thousand feet high and covered with eternal snows, we seek in vain. In vain do we search for a view of a single one of the monarchs of the Chippewyan Range.

As is well known, literature has always had its requirements, which varied according to time, race and country. But, as is not so generally recognized, science too has had its requirements in times past, which limited and controlled its development. Perhaps it has its arbitrary and illogical requirements to-day, while we are not aware of them. The slave knows not how deeply the fetter has cut into his flesh until it has been cast away.

There was a singular demand made on the American ethnographer of a generation or two ago, and it has scarcely yet been silenced. He was obliged to advance a theory of an Old World origin for the American aborigines, and if not for the whole race, at least for that part of it in which he was most interested. The shelves of libraries of Americana are crowded with volumes devoted to proving such theories. Such an important place in the speculations of that time did these theories have, that a great religious system (a system which forms to-day one of the greatest political problems that confront us) is based upon the theory of the descent of the Indians from the ten lost tribes of Israel. We can understand Catlin's environment better, when we remember that he lived in the time the angel Moroni revealed to Joseph Smith the hiding place of the golden tablets on which was engraved the book of Mormon.

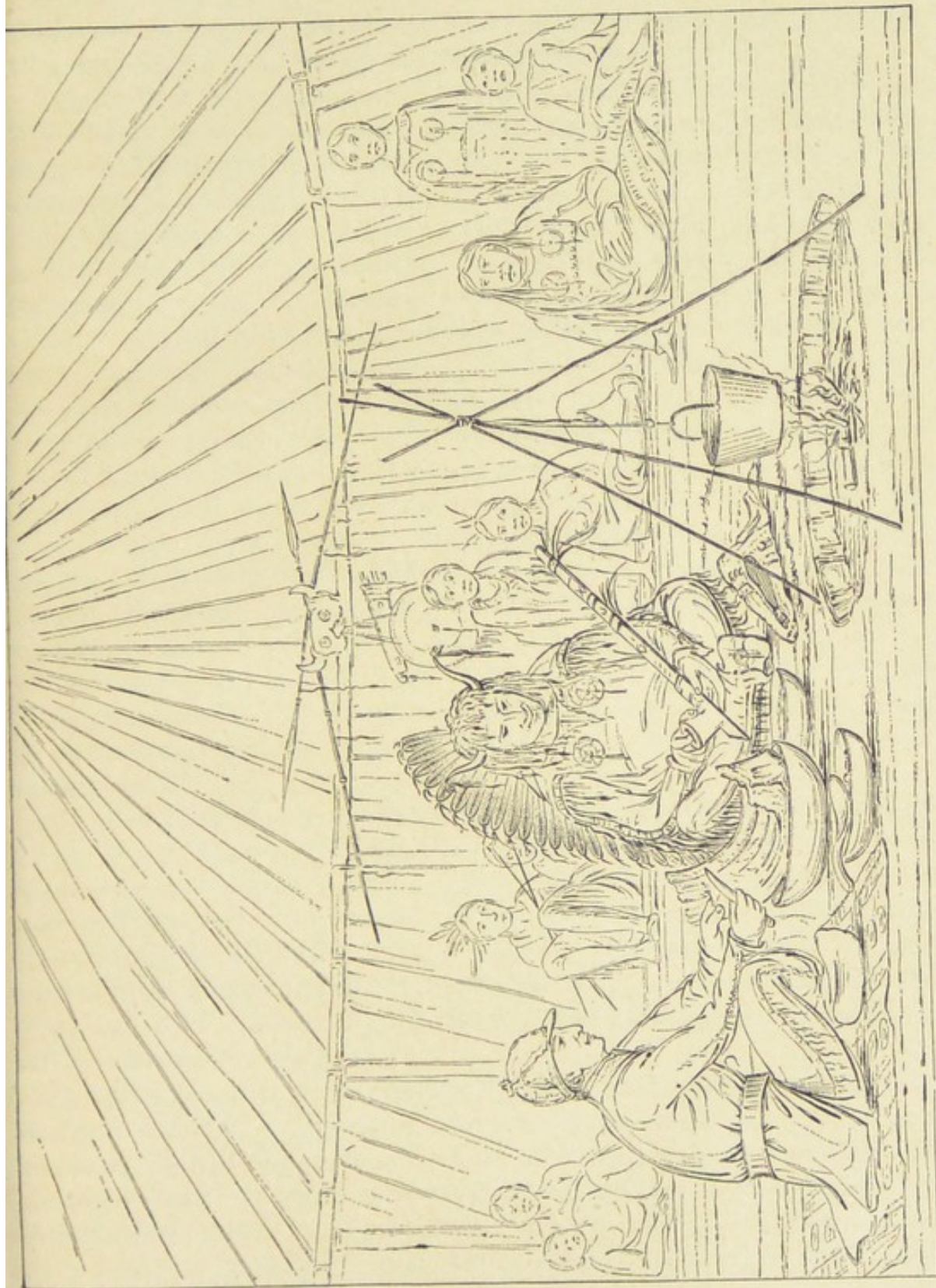
Catlin's journey in 1832 on the Upper Missouri was his first important expedition, his first journey into a really wild land, as well as the most fruitful journey in artistic and ethnographic material that he ever made. His most interesting observations were taken among a sedentary, house-building, agricultural people named Mandans. Tribes of this class were not uncommon in America in his day, but at the time of his visit he was not aware of the fact. In the Mandan villages he found a hospitable and intelligent trader named Joseph Kipp, who

proved himself a guide and interpreter of unusual value, and made the stay of his guest both pleasant and profitable. The latter arrived at the time of a most important rite of the Mandans, the whole of which he was permitted to witness and the like of which he never saw before or after. This rite I shall refer to at length before the close of the lecture. Mr. Kipp, too, undoubtedly spoke well of his Indian friends. I have often observed on the frontier that white men who have lived long with any particular tribe of Indians acquire a greater sense of loyalty to such tribe, that they hate its enemies, love its friends, sound its praises, and maintain its superiority to all other tribes. Had Catlin had opportunities of witnessing the great ceremonies of other nations under the conduct of guides as well informed as Mr. Kipp, he would not perhaps have considered the Mandans so superior to other tribes as he represents them in his writings. It was this people which he selected as the subject of his origin theory. By a series of arguments and conclusions which we would now call "jumping," but which passed muster in the science of half a century ago, he established to his own satisfaction that the Mandans were descended from certain Welshmen who sailed in ten ships under the direction of Prince Madoc from North Wales in the early part of the fourteenth century. Although his theory has little value in the light shed by modern investigation, it controlled all his opinions, distorted many of his statements, and has transmitted its evil influence through the works of a host of compilers and book-makers, many of them of high fame in the scientific world, down to the present day. So much for some of the unfavorable influences of his environment.

There are various portraits and pictures of our subject extant. One appears in his notes on Travel in Europe. Mr. Thomas Donaldson, in his recent work,* presents three, and in his own works the artist often includes sketches of himself. The plate facing page 701 in Donaldson's work is a copy of a picture painted by the artist's own hand when he was twenty-eight years old. He is represented by his contemporaries as a person of medium height, slender, well formed, very graceful, and of a complexion so decidedly dark that some of his friends thought he might possibly claim for his own, a little of the blood of that race to whose study he had devoted a life-time.

In Pl. CXXX is shown one of Catlin's sketches of himself in the prime of his activity and usefulness. It represents him in 1832, at the age of thirty-six, seated at a feast in the lodge of Mah-to-toh-pa or Four Bears, then second chief of the Mandans, dressed in his buckskin hunting suit. According to the etiquette of the place and time, he eats alone out of a wooden bowl, while his host fills the calumet for him to smoke after his meal, and the women of the household act the part of spectators.

* "The George Catlin Indian Gallery in the U. S. National Museum (Smithsonian Institution), with Memoir and Statistics," in Smithsonian Report for 1885.



CATLIN DINING WITH MAH-TO-TOH-PA (FOUR BEARS), MANDAN CHIEF, JULY, 1832, AT THE MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 123.)

The plate facing page 711 in Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery" is from a photograph taken in 1868, when he had reached the venerable age of seventy-two, about four years prior to his death. A scar on the left cheek, which shows in this picture, was caused accidentally by a hatchet stroke received in boyhood from a comrade with whom he was "playing Indian," an indication that the sight of the delegation in Philadelphia was not the first incident in his life which led to his vocation, although it may have been the decisive one.

Whatever unfavorable criticism may be made of Catlin as a colorist, little disparagement can be made of his accuracy and spirit as a delineator. In landscape he seizes the genius of the locality with marvelous quickness and insight. Any one who has traveled on the Upper Missouri will recognize how perfectly, in a few strokes, in the sketch before us (Pl. CXXXI, Fig. 1), he has fixed the features of that turbid flood, with its monotonous walls of cottonwood trees, terraced as they rise from the newer to the older alluvial deposits on its shores; with its caving bank, its falling trees and snags on the convexity of the river's curve where the current strikes the land with greatest force, and the low, shelving bank of the opposite side. It is not a placid stream; with a few well placed lines he tells us that it moves at the rate of seven miles an hour.

Geology, sixty years ago, was an infant science. The geologic landscape artist had not become differentiated from landscape artists in general—to this day but a limited few have obtained high proficiency among this class, yet I doubt if some of the best draftsmen attached to our own Government surveys could bring out more correctly the salient features of the 4000 ft Tertiary bluffs of the Dakota region than Mr. Catlin has done in the sketch represented in Pl. CXXXI, Fig. 2. Such is the country that is so appropriately designated *Mauvaises Terres*, or Bad Lands.

Pl. CXXXII, Fig. 1, copies his painting of a feature common in the bluffs of the Upper Missouri region, where small interrupted deposits of hard sandstone are mingled with much softer formations, not greatly exceeding ordinary clay in hardness. These pieces of sandstone, protecting the underlying soft rock from erosion by the rain, cause a series of pillars to be formed, as shown in the painting. A seam of lignite runs along the base of the bluff. The flood plain of the Missouri, here almost treeless, forms the distance.

The picture shown in Pl. CXXXII, Fig. 2, represents conical hills, which are very common in the same country. From these summits, during the rare rains of the region, streams of temporary existence flow with great force and cut deep, narrow, fantastic gulleys in the alluvial soil, such as that shown in the painting. These hills are striped horizontally in divers beautiful colors, being composed of strata of different tints to which the original canvas does ample justice.

Everywhere he has seized the distinctive features of the landscape and apparently with an intuitive understanding of its geologic

basis. We need not marvel when we learn that in his later years, without any extensive book study, he became a good practical geologist. In this picture (Pl. CXXXIII, Fig. 1) he gives us a striking representation of the peculiar billowy hills which are so characteristic of the loëss deposits of the Missouri Valley in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska. These are the hills of loëss of 1832, with their smooth, grass-clad sides and their scanty groves in the ravines; such, too, they still seemed when last I saw them, fourteen years ago; but a change even then was coming over them; prairie fires were at an end and small shrubs were rising above the grass. These are perhaps good sized saplings to-day. So the forest will spread and soon the beautiful clear-cut outlines of these billowy slopes will no more have power to inspire the artist's hand.

In this, as in a hundred other cases, the pictures have, for us, a high historic value as fixing an irrevocable past. They show us landmarks of the West which have long ago disappeared, such as old trading posts of the Indian country; Fort Union, which stood forty years at the mouth of the Yellowstone, but the lines of whose foundation walls can scarcely be traced to-day.

Floyd's grave, the place of interment of the only man who died on Lewis and Clarke's famous expedition in 1804, is shown in Pl. CXXXIII, Fig. 2. Is there any trace of the once lonely mound now in the busy environs of Sioux City? Does the pole still stand, as Catlin shows it, over Blackbird's grave (Pl. CXXXIV, Fig. 1), the last instance of a sepulchral mound built in historic times, showing that our modern Indians were mound builders? The self-reared monument of Julien Dubuque, the first white man who worked the Upper Mississippi lead-mines, a century ago, stood perfect still in Catlin's day, a stone hut with door of lead and cross of cedar (Pl. CXXXIV, Fig. 2); but, thirty-five years ago, I have seen it level with the ground. Such are some of the many obliterated land-marks reared by human hands that Catlin's pencil has perpetuated.

But works of nature, the landmarks erected by the eternal elements; can these be obliterated? Have they any past which the artist can preserve for the coming generations? Let this picture decide. Here are the falls of St. Anthony (Pl. CXXXV, Fig. 1), as they roared to an untenanted solitude in the year 1835, when George Catlin visited and sketched them. Who would recognize any identity between that fair wild scene and the falls of St. Anthony of to-day (Pl. CXXXV, Fig. 2).

A very large proportion of the paintings in this collection is devoted to Indian games and hunting scenes (Pl. CXXXVI, Fig. 1), and these represent from a scientific point of view the most valuable part of the whole collection, with the exception of the four scenes of the great Mandan

*Since this was written I have learned that (the grave being endangered by the gradual falling away of the edge of the bluff) the people of Sioux City have recently removed the remains of Sergeant Floyd further back from the river on the same hill.

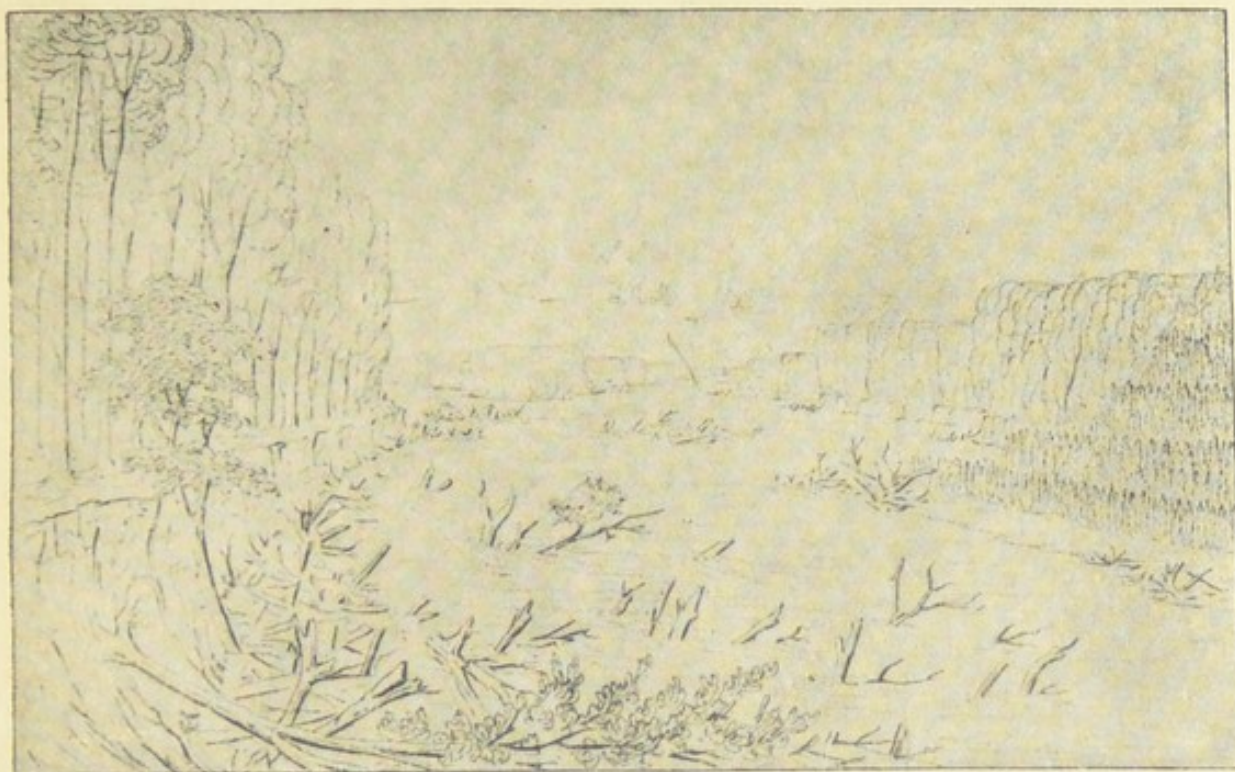


FIG. 1. SCENE ON THE UPPER MISSOURI.

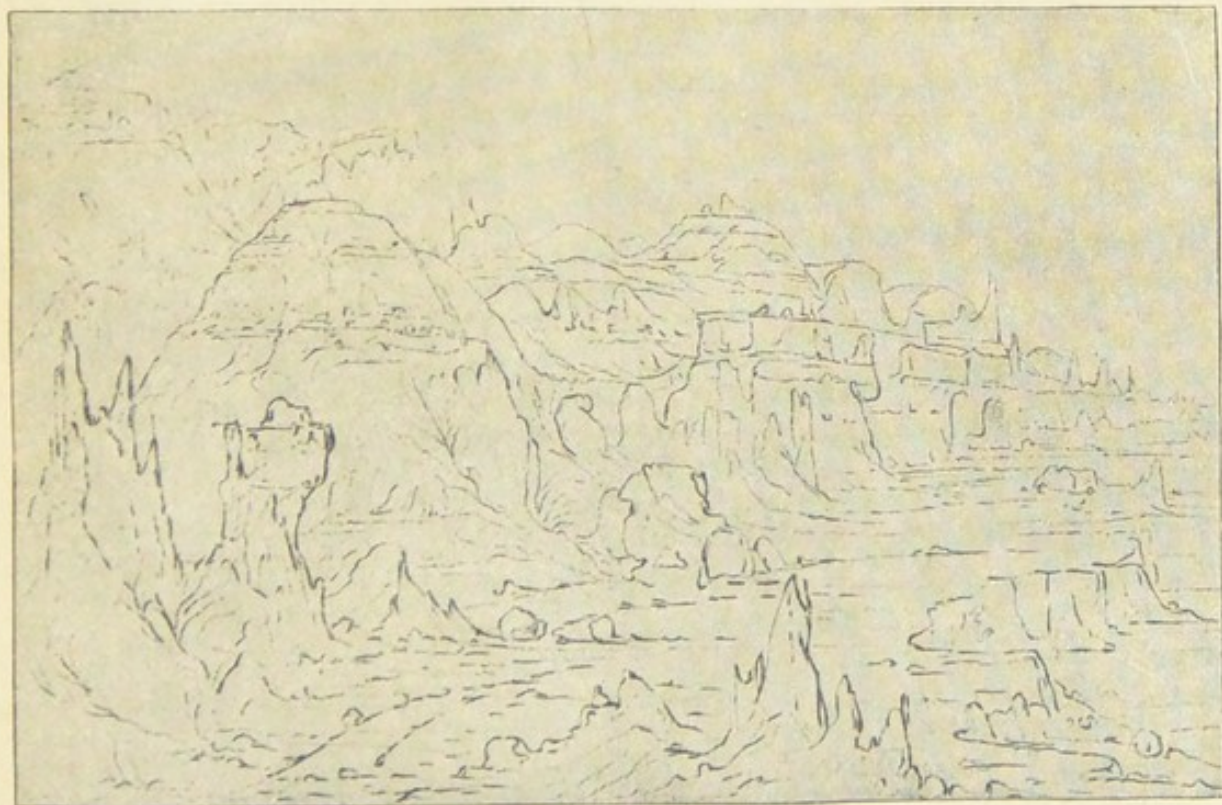
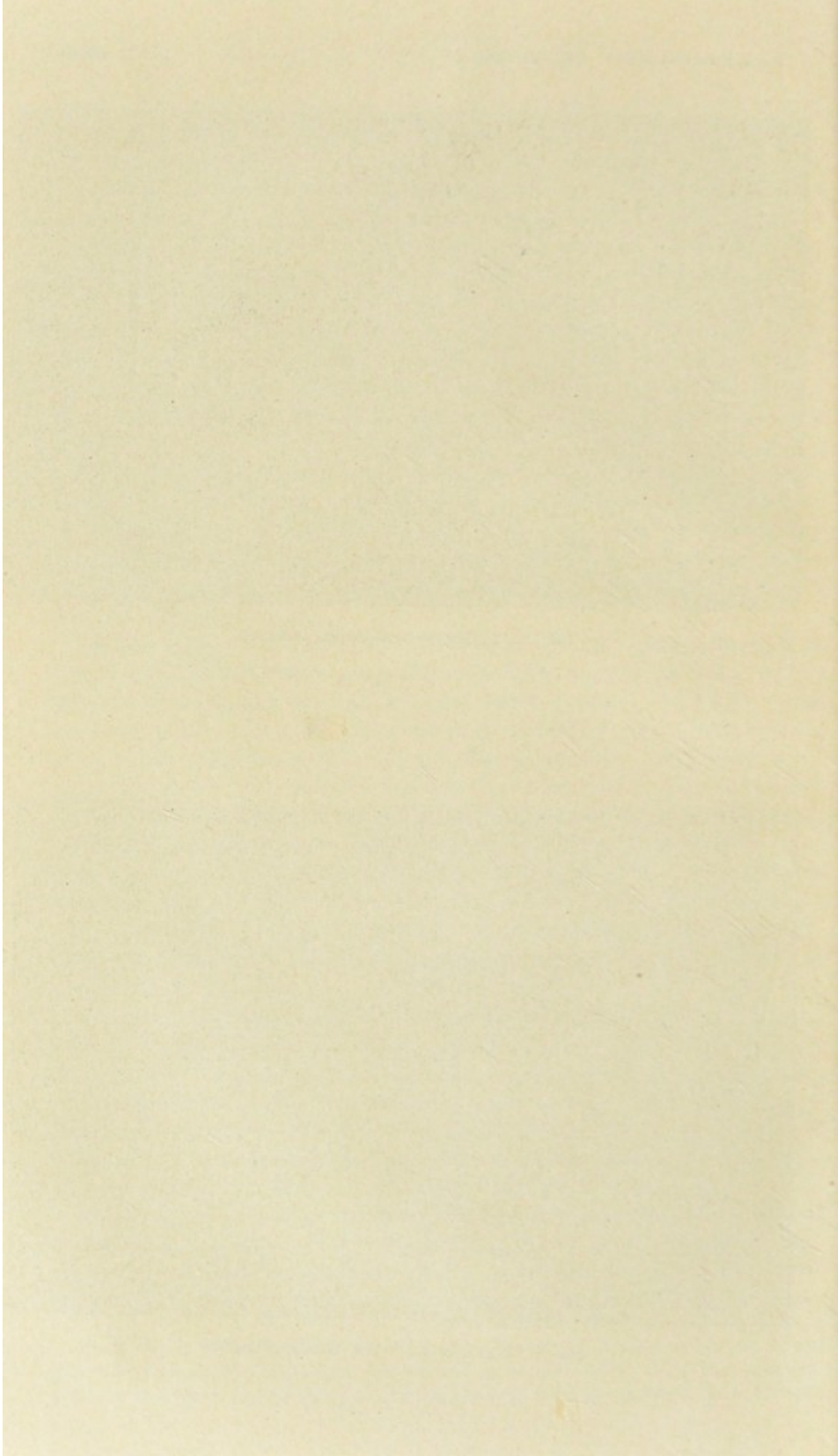


FIG. 2. BAD LANDS ON THE UPPER MISSOURI.



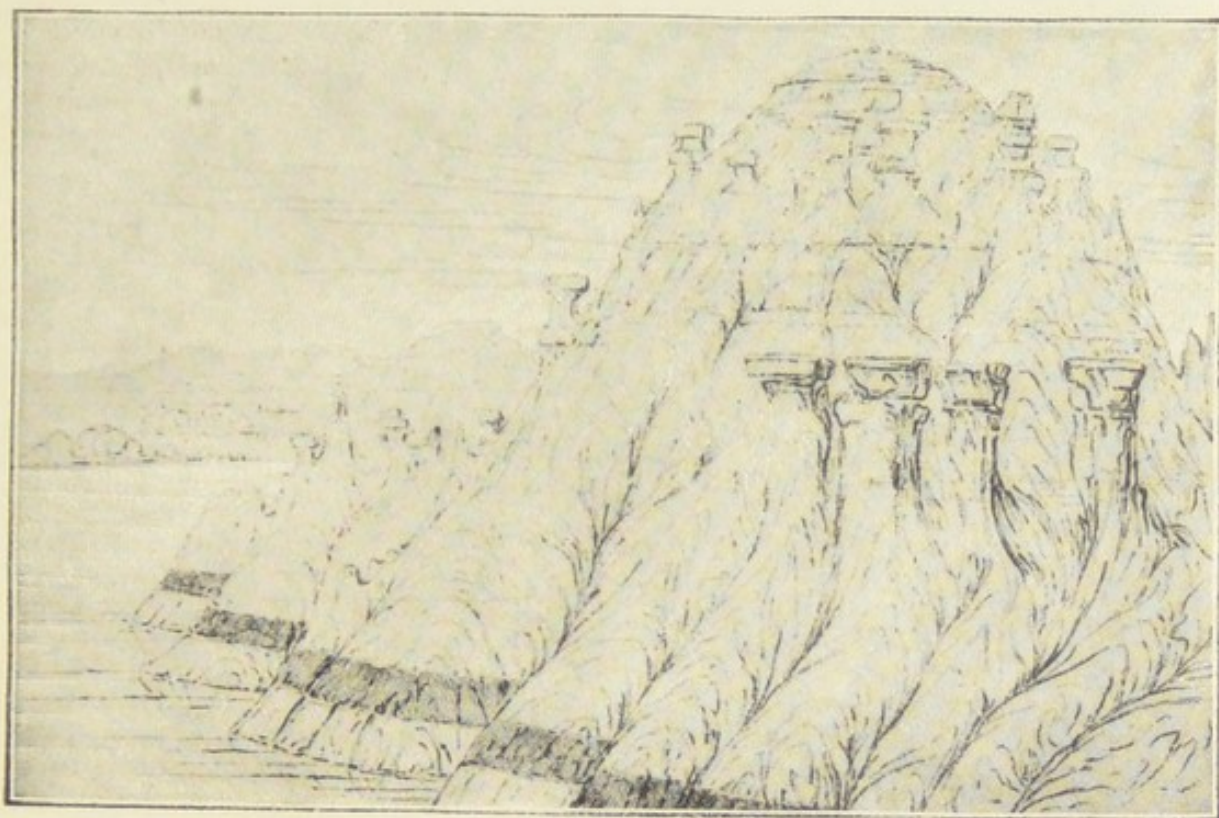


FIG. 1. BLUFFS ON THE UPPER MISSOURI.

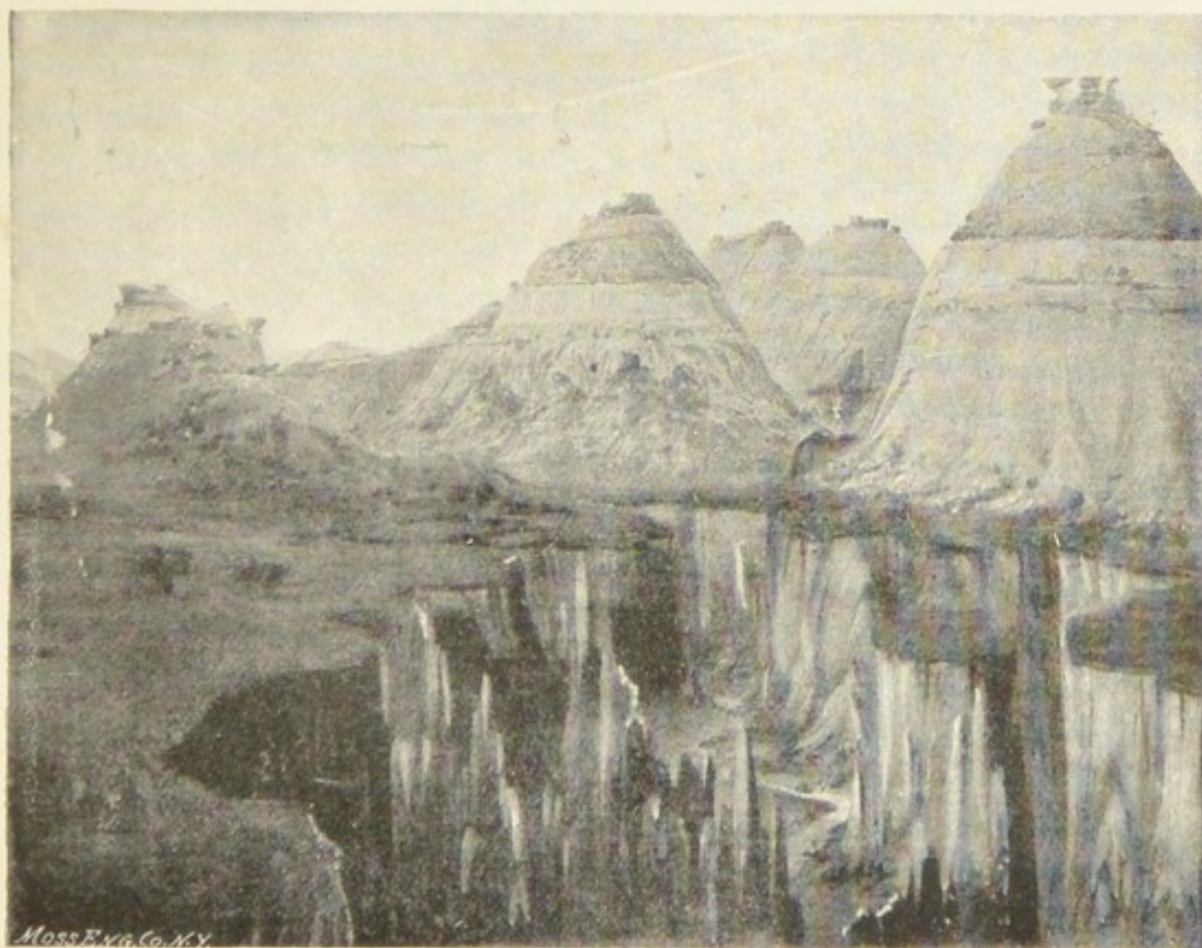
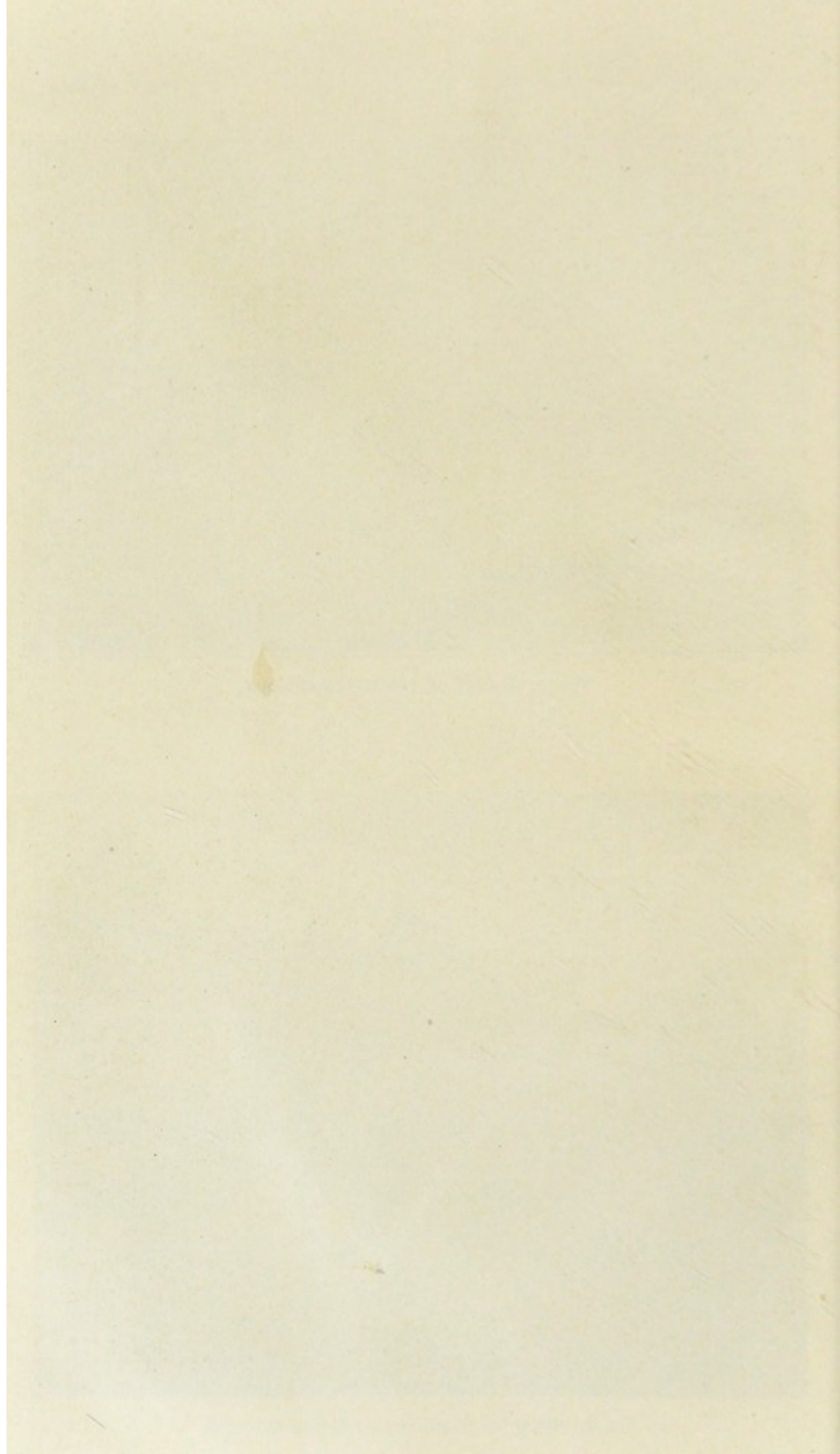


FIG. 2. SCENE ON BANKS OF THE UPPER MISSOURI.



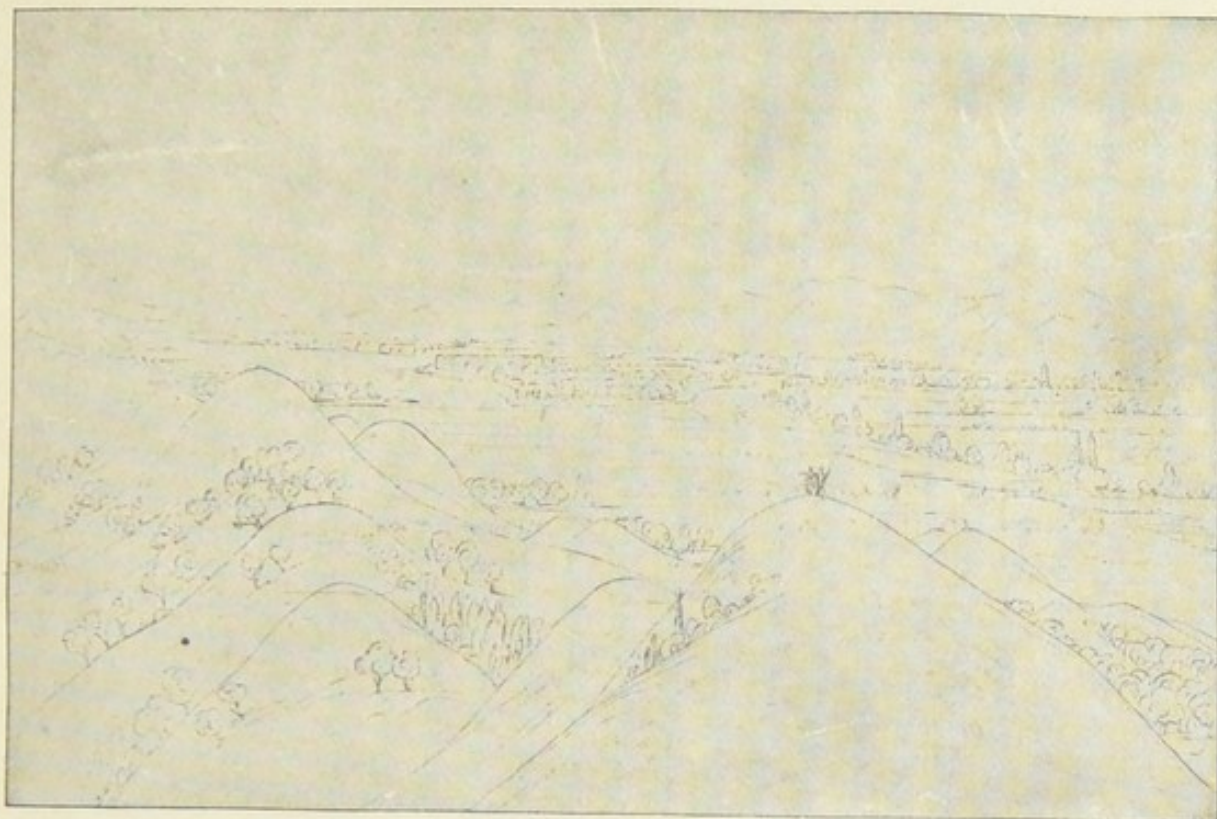


FIG. 1. HILLS OF THE LOESS, UPPER MISSOURI.

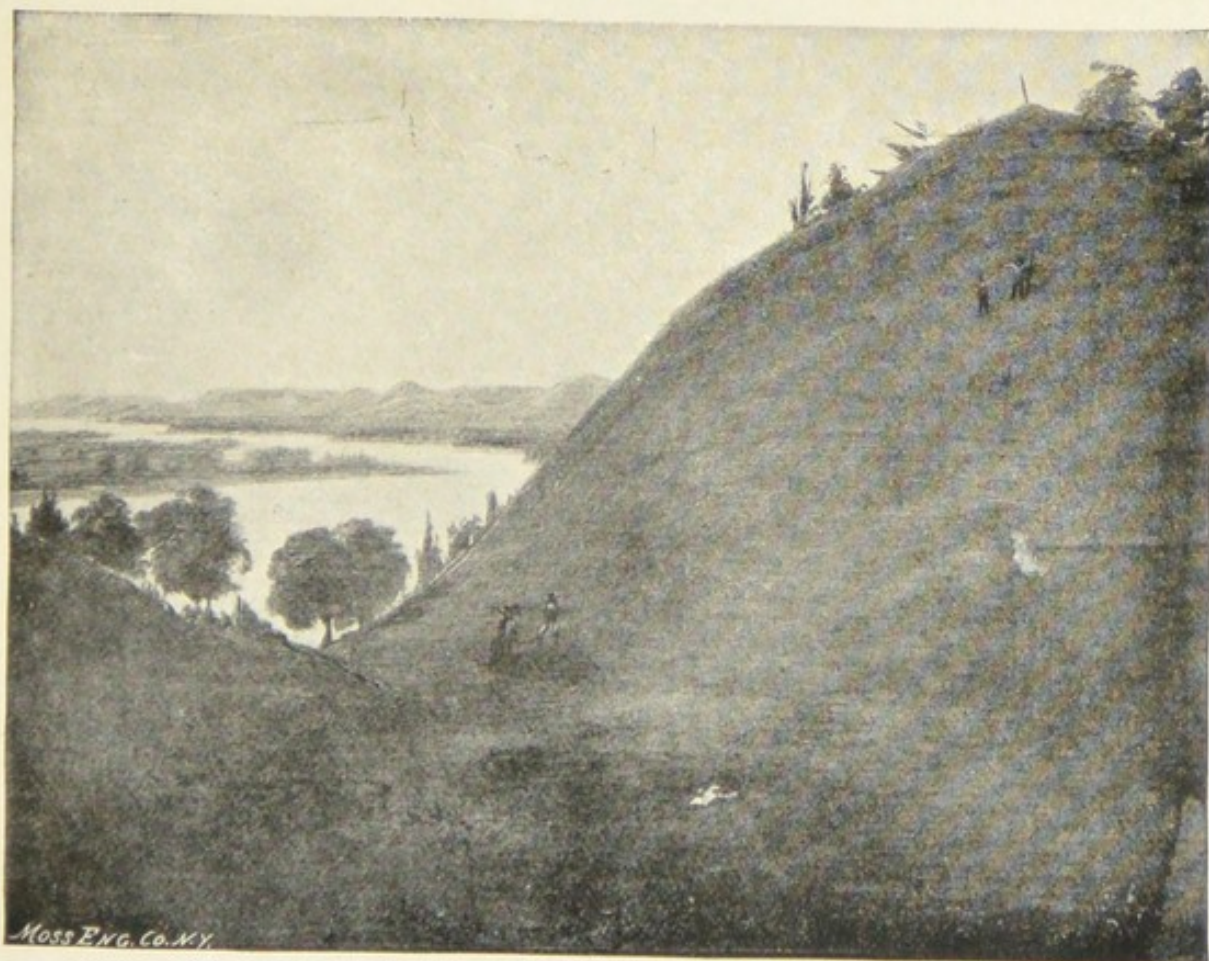
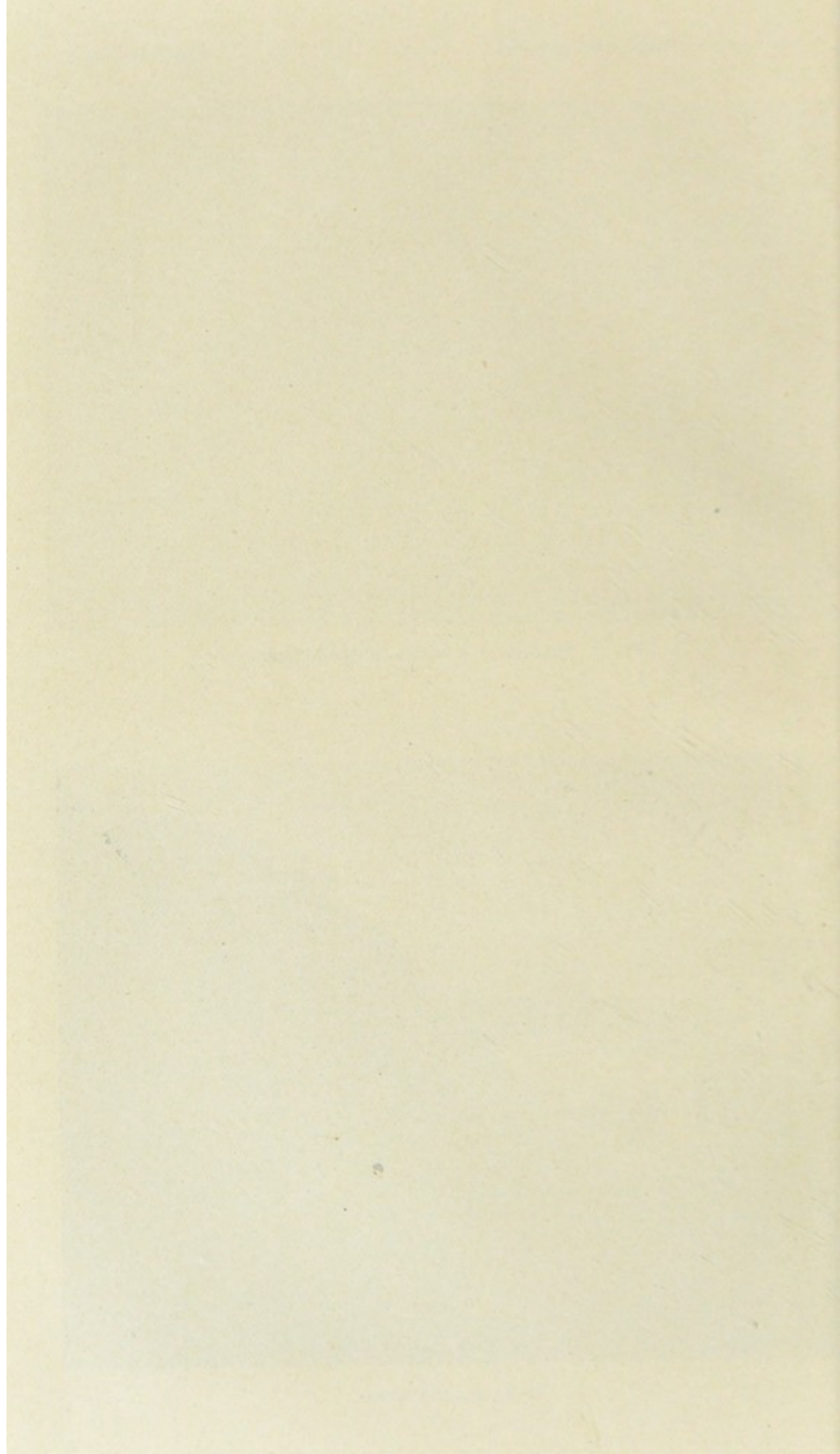


FIG. 2. FLOYD'S GRAVE.



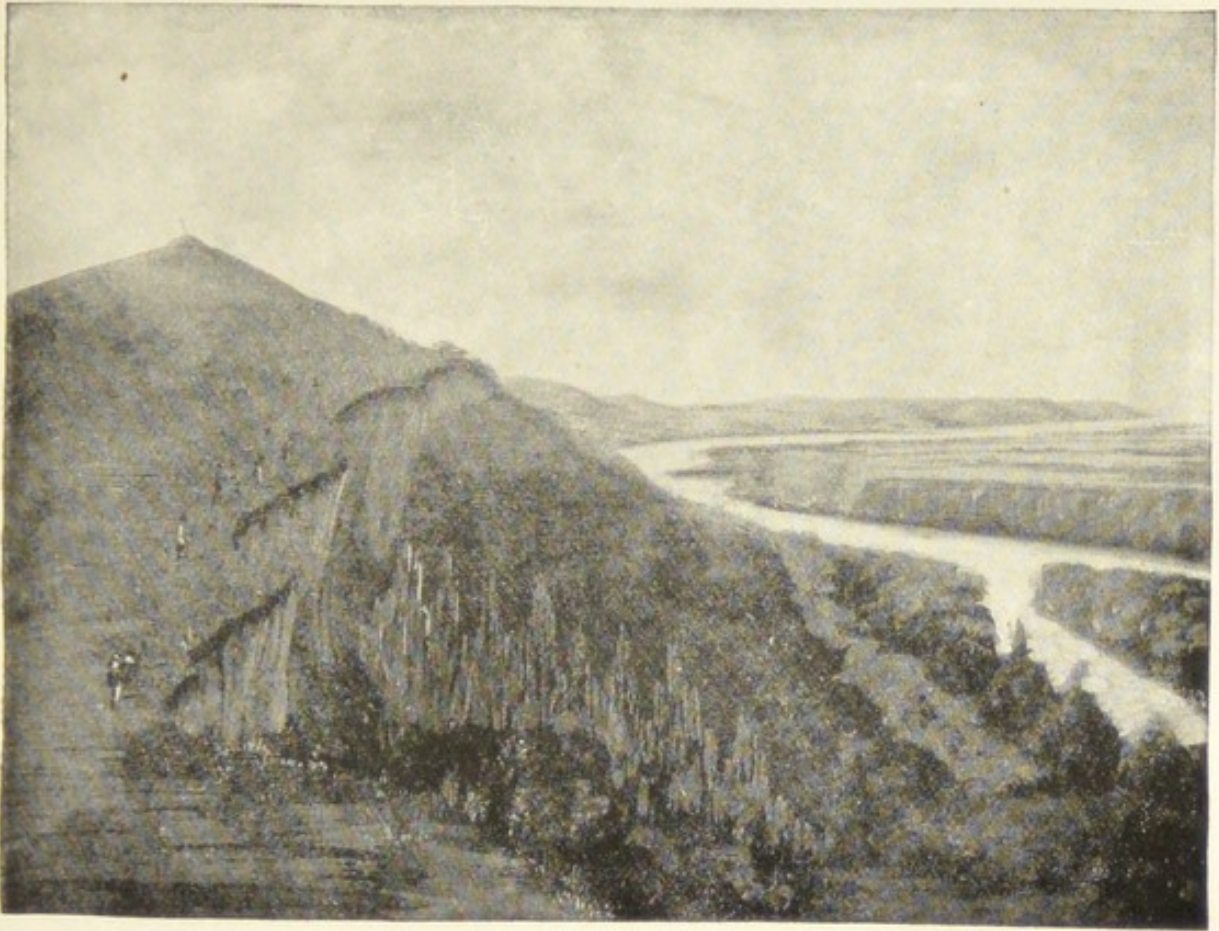


FIG. 1. BLACKBIRD'S GRAVE.

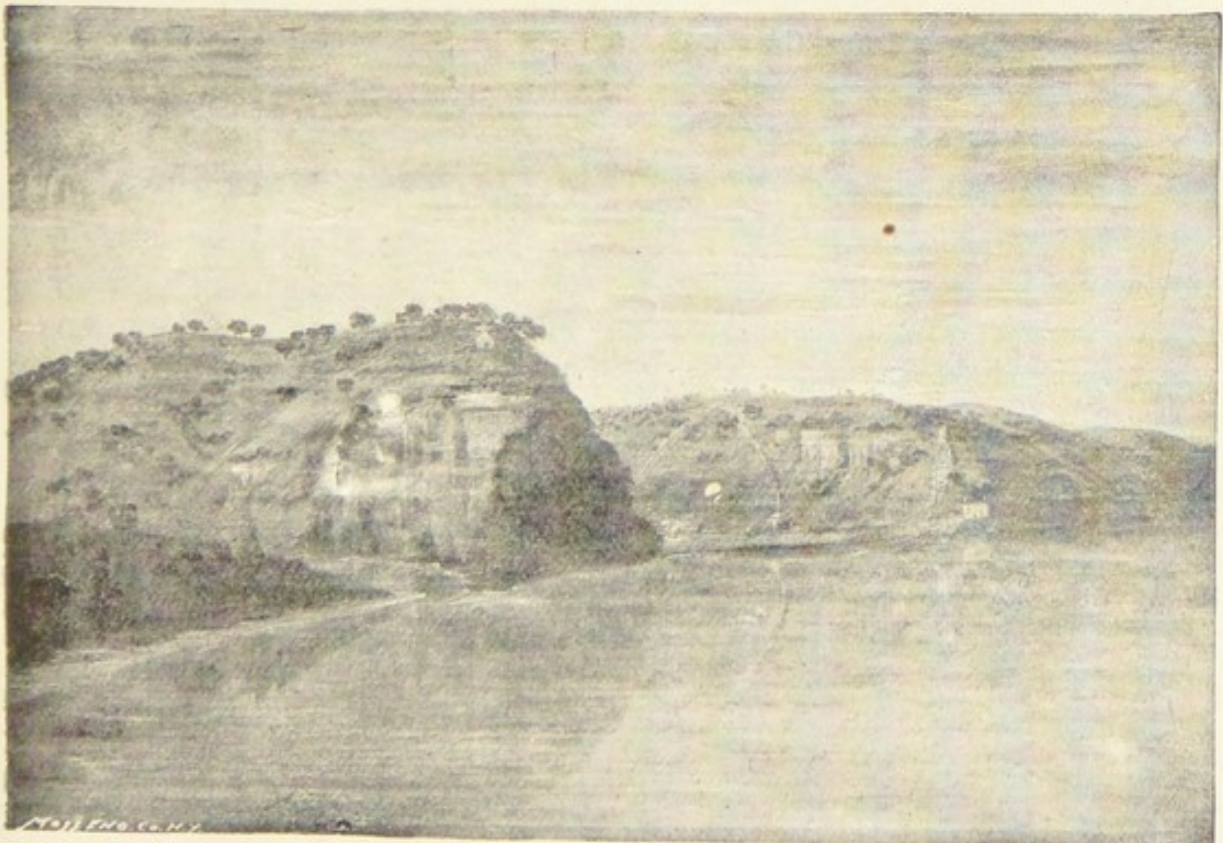
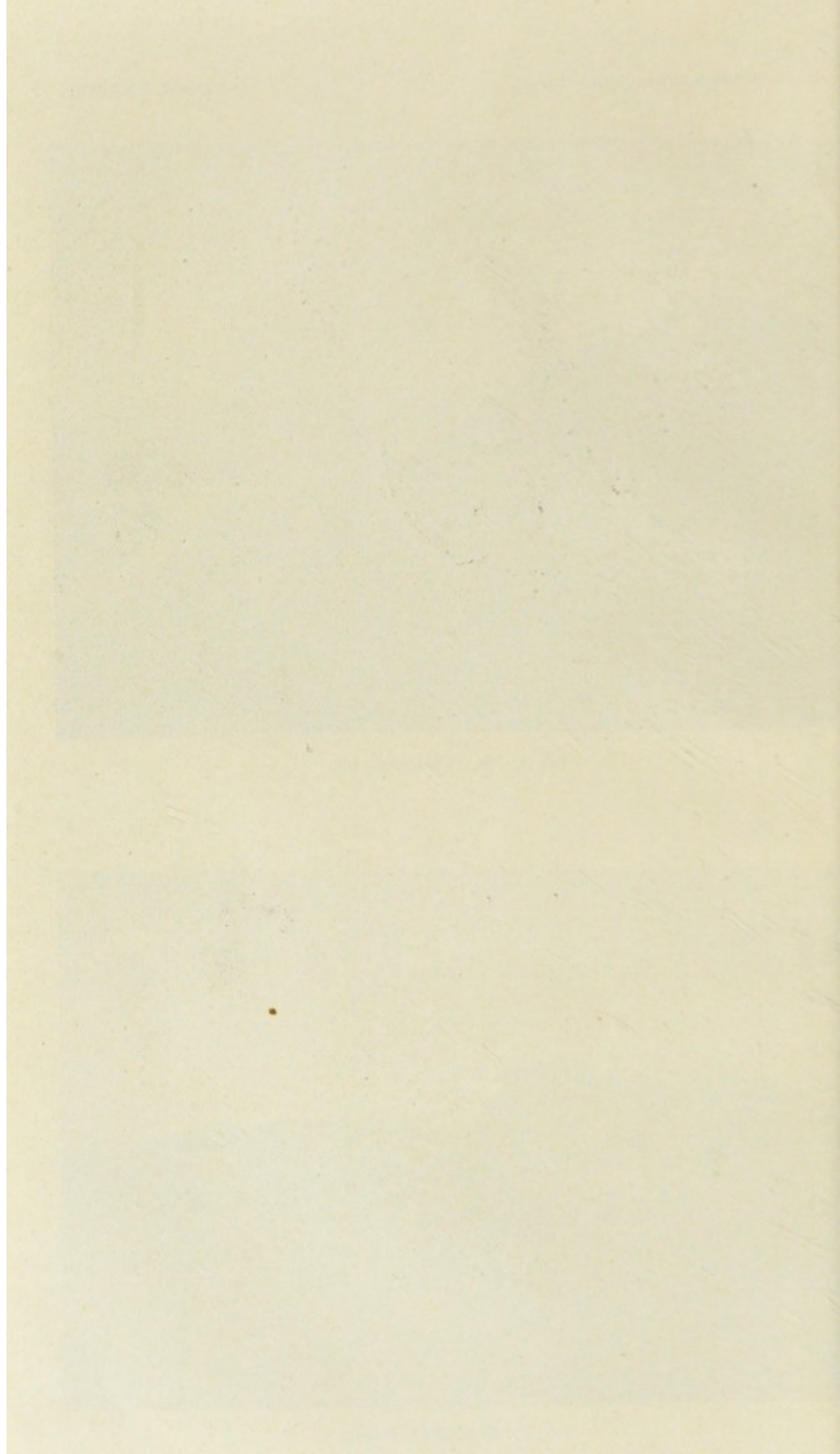


FIG. 2. DUBUQUE'S GRAVE.



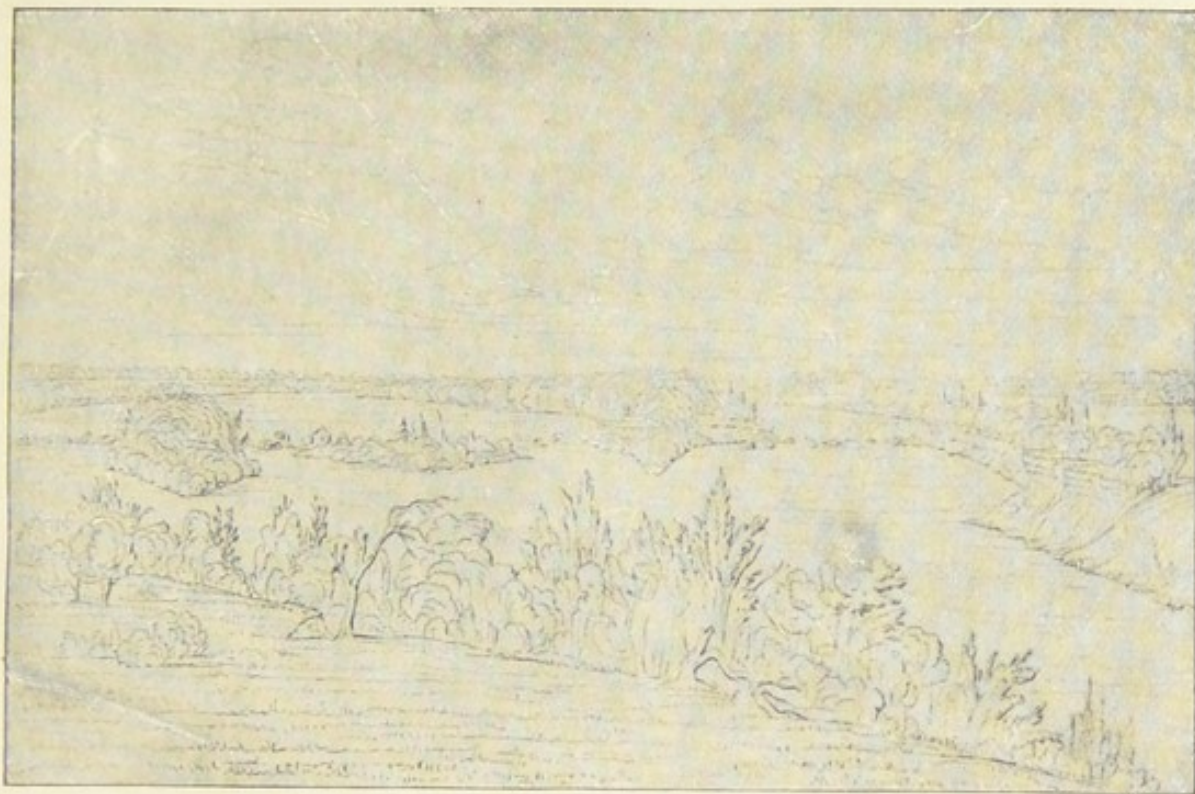


FIG. 1. FALLS OF ST. ANTHONY IN 1835.

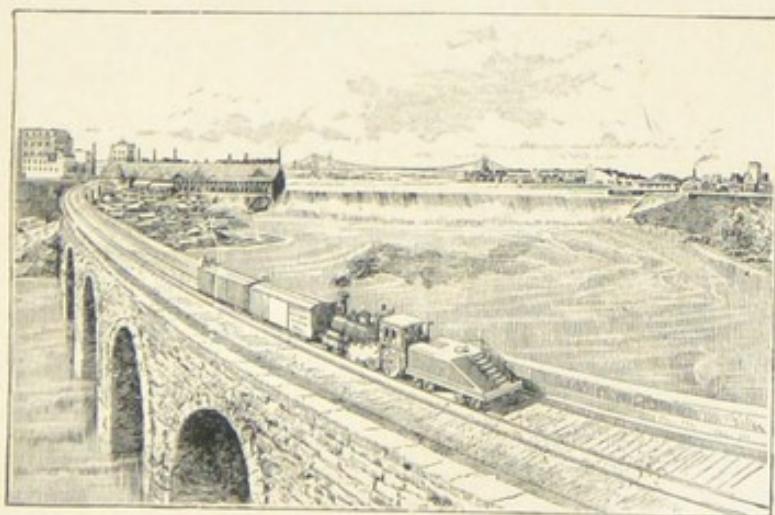


FIG. 2. MODERN FALLS OF ST. ANTHONY.



FIG. 1. BUFFALO HUNT ON HORSEBACK.



FIG. 2. MANDAN GAME OF TCHUNG-KEE.

(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 74.)

ceremony to be hereafter described. The scene in Pl. CXXXVI, Fig. 2, is presented, not because it is the most picturesque of this class that he has painted, but because, simple as it is, he has caught the spirit of the situation so well. The pose of the men who are betting on the game and watching anxiously the fall of the hoop is excellent. I have heard many favorable comments made on this plate by Indians. This game of Tchung-kee was, with some modifications, practiced over the greater part of North America at the time of the discovery and until long after.

Catlin devotes four canvasses to illustrating the exciting ball game of the Choctaws. One of his illustrations is shown in Pl. CXXXVII. He tells us that it is impossible with pen and ink alone, or brush, or even with their combined efforts to give more than a caricature of such a scene. However true this remark may be it is not to be denied that he here presents to us an unusually lively spectacle.

But the great temptation to present more illustrations of Indian games, some of which I have had the good fortune to witness, must be resisted.

The majority of his hunting scenes represent an irreclaimable past, since they are largely associated with an animal practically extinct, the American bison or buffalo. Catlin had the true spirit of the hunter; he was an excellent rider, a good shot, and for these reasons he delighted in painting hunting scenes, and he infuses more life into such studies than into any others which he executed. Pl. CXXXVIII, represents the destruction of a small band of buffalo which he witnessed near the Mandan villages. His pen picture of the scene is no less vivid than the work of his brush. Of course such paintings as this must have been largely worked up after the occasion, from hasty sketches and from memory, notes, and imagination; but they are none the less valuable on that account. The instantaneous camera came too late for the buffalo surround. But had it come in time, it might not have caught as much of the scene as the artist's eye has caught.

Pl. CXXXVI, Fig. 1, represents his own first chase on horseback after the buffalo at the mouth of the Yellowstone, in 1832, in company with Kenneth Mackenzie,—whose name was famous in the annals of the old trading days of the Northwest,—and a French Canadian named Chadron. As he puts himself into this picture (he is the rider in the background; it is Chadron who is climbing his charger's neck), it is reasonable to suppose that while he was riding his horse after the bison he was not also standing on the ground and making a sketch of himself. This picture is therefore a composition.

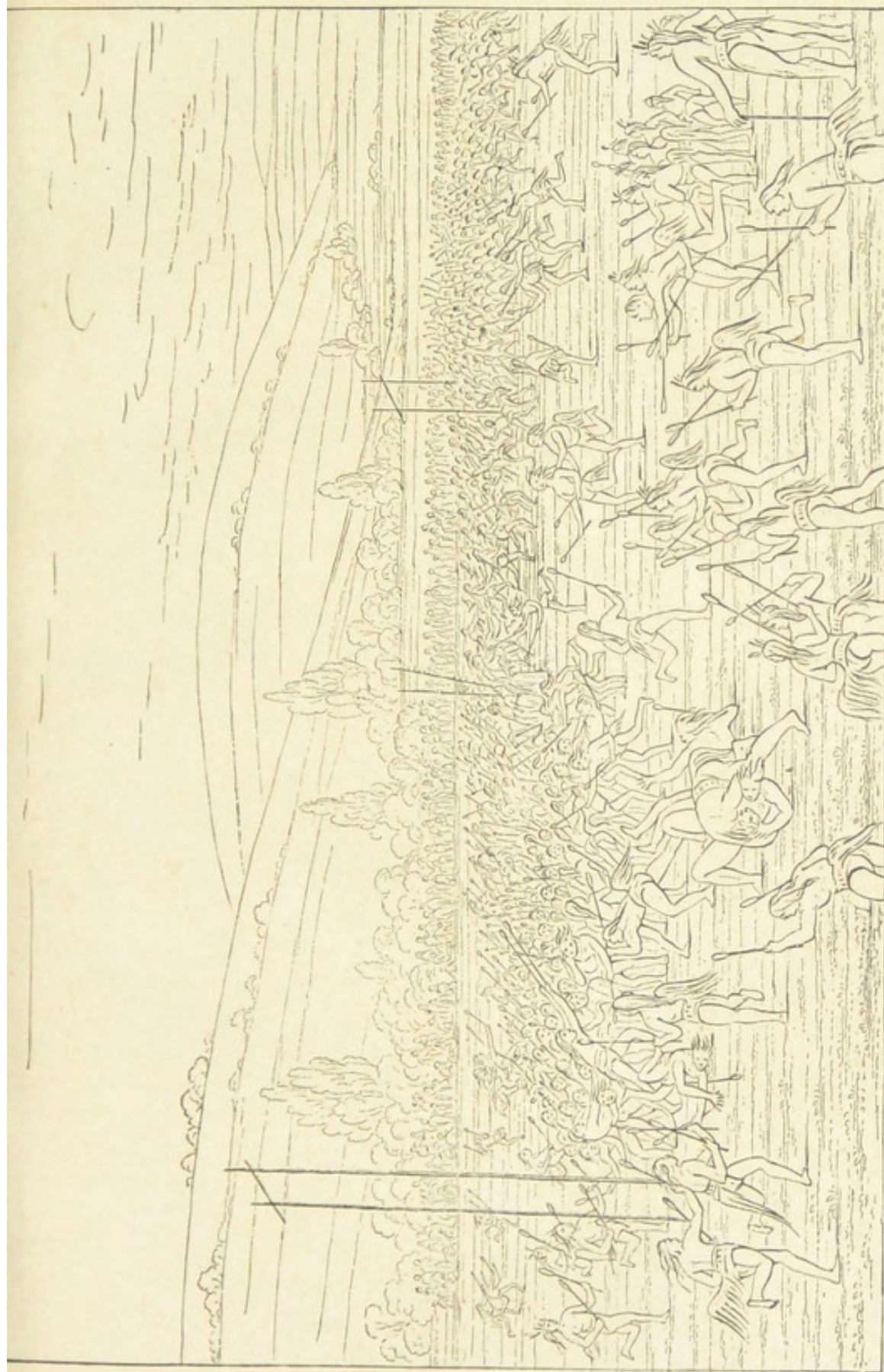
So also is the illustration presented in Pl. CXXXIX, natural and realistic as it seems. Mr. Catlin saw all the elements of this picture in different places and at different times; his artistic imagination has combined them and given us a pleasing, and for all purposes of illustration a truthful, picture. He saw walking Indians in one place, snowshoes in another, walking buffaloes in the summer in the far West, snow in some

safe eastern situation in winter, and common cattle toiling through the snow from which he could imagine the pose of the bison under similar circumstances. But *this* winter hunt, or any like winter hunt, he never saw. A careful perusal of his writing will be sufficient to satisfy any one that he never visited the northern buffalo ranges in the winter, and therefore could not have witnessed such scenes. He made his itineraries in the Indian country in summer and worked up his notes and sketches in some eastern city in winter.

But the chief wealth of this gallery is in its portraits of Indians, many of whom are historic characters. He publishes many certificates of the authenticity and correctness of his portraits. To the world at large these may be of value; but, for my own part, I desire no better witnesses than the tears I have seen shed over some of them by the children and the grandchildren of the subjects.

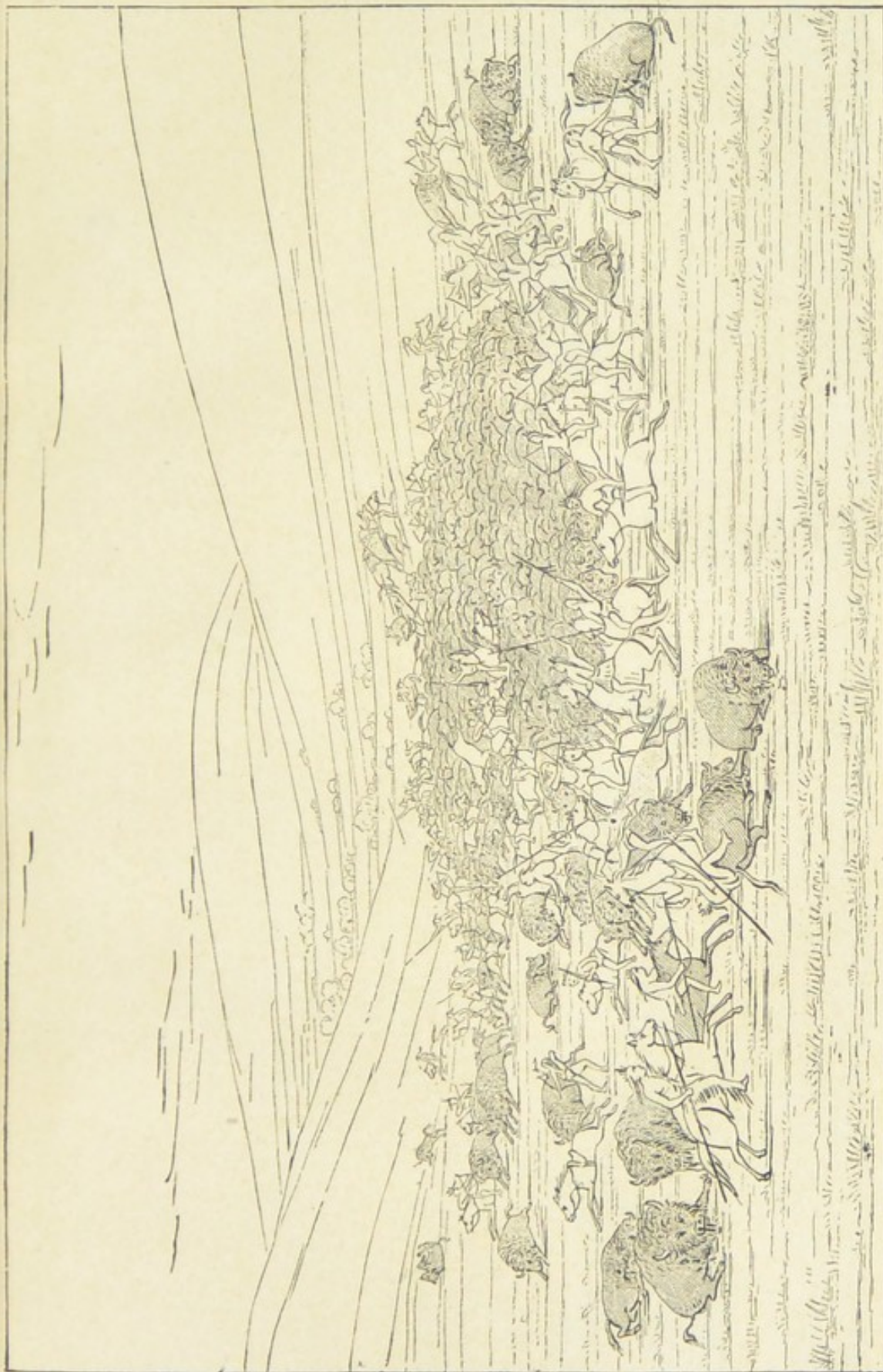
Singularly enough Catlin's works seem not to have circulated in early days in the lands in which the scenes of his labor were laid. My first acquaintance with the Mandans was made in 1865. At that time all recollection of Catlin's visit was lost, both by the Indians and the whites who lived among them. White men who had traded for years among the Indians knew nothing of him. About 4 years after my first arrival on the Upper Missouri I succeeded in getting a copy of his "Illustrations," etc., "of the North American Indians," in two volumes. This was before the days not only of railroads and express offices, but of even regular post-offices and post-roads in North Dakota, and the introduction of rare books was no easy matter. The work created the liveliest interest amongst the Indians. I lived then at Fort Stevenson (now an Indian school), some 16 miles distant from the village where the remains of the three tribes, called by Catlin the Mandans, Riccarrees, and Minnetarees, were living together. The news soon spread among these Indians that I had a book containing the "faces of their fathers," and ere many days my quarters at Fort Stevenson were thronged with eager visitors. The portraits, although appearing in Catlin's plates only as light, unshaded etchings, were generally readily recognized by the children and the grandchildren of the departed heroes represented. The women rarely restrained their tears at the sight of these ancestral pictures. The men seemed to have less feeling and interest, but I soon had evidence that their indifference was affected.

Those who have read Catlin's works are aware that his most honored Indian hero was Four Bears, a chief of the Mandans, Pl. CXL. He devoted one full-page plate to Four Bears' portrait, another to his hospitality, four to his buffalo robe, an entire chapter to his personality and history, and he often refers to him elsewhere in his various works. Among those who came to see my books was a son of this Four Bears, named Rushing Eagle, Pl. CXLI, or (as he was more familiarly called by the whites) Bad Gun. Rushing Eagle was the second chief of the



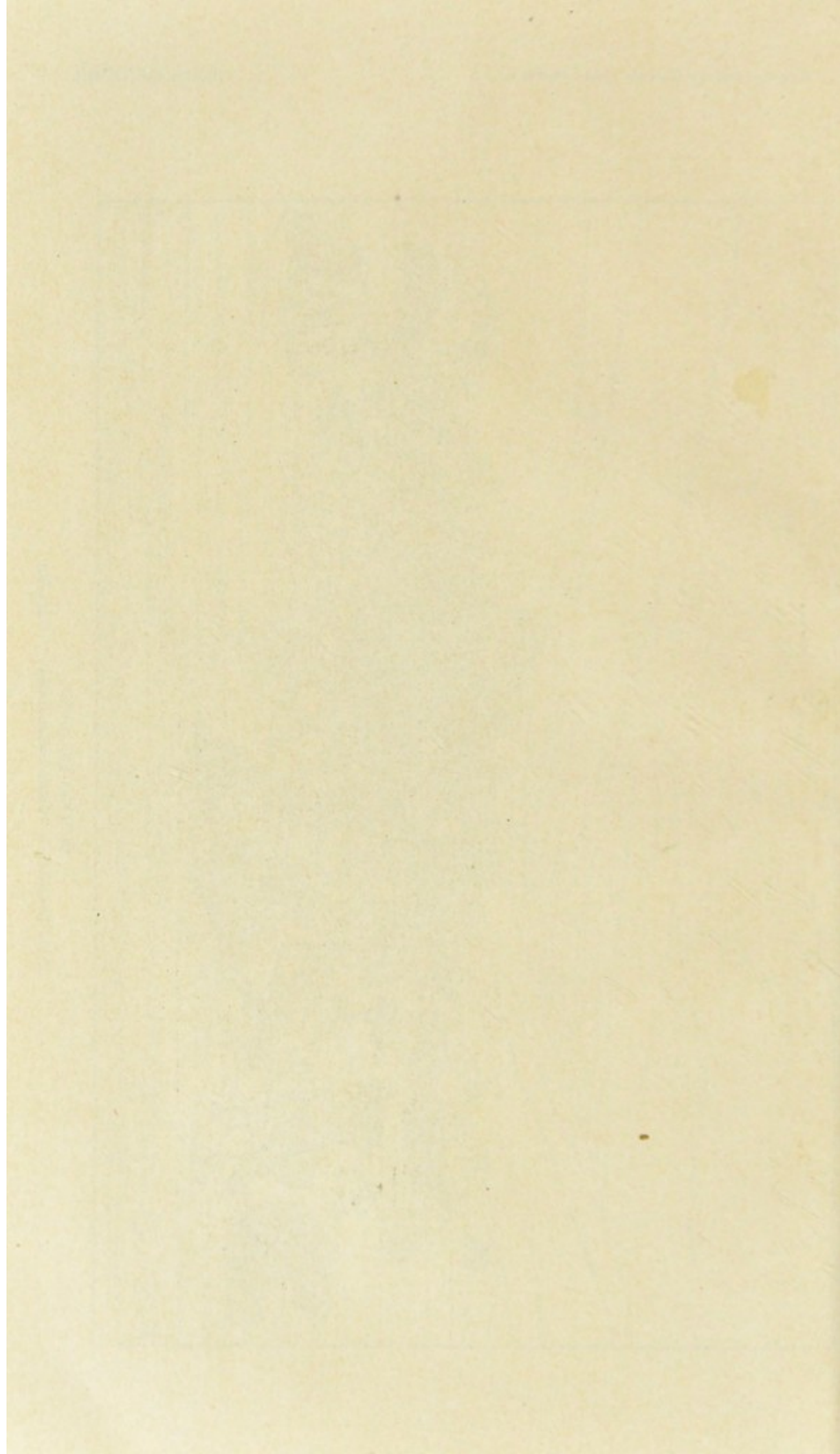
CHOCTAW BALL PLAY.

(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 72.)



BUFFALO SURROUND.

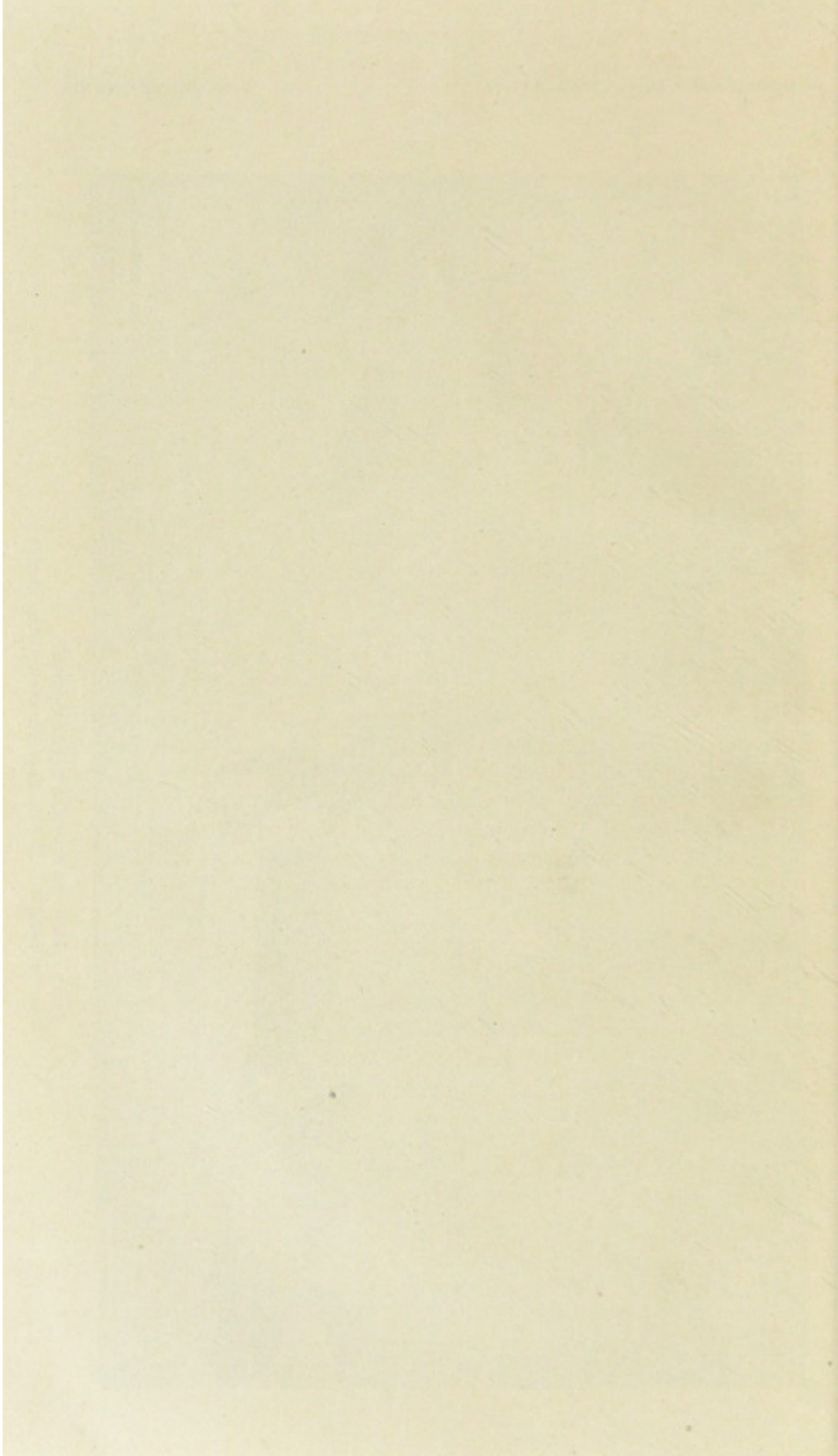
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 69.)





HUNTING BUFFALO ON SNOW-SHOES.

(From a painting in the U. S. National Museum by George Catlin.)



Mandans. He had already earned a high reputation for himself as a warrior and counselor. He was very gentle in his manner, reticent, dignified, and disinclined to beg favors of white men. At the time of which I am speaking he was a middle-aged man. His father had been dead over thirty years, and I did not suppose that his recollection of his parent could be very vivid. At the first sight of the picture of Four Bears he showed no emotion, although he regarded it long and intently. While he was gazing at it I was called on business out of the room and I left him alone with the book, telling him, correctly, as I supposed, that I would be gone some time, and asking him not to leave until I returned; but in a few moments I was obliged to come back for something I needed. When I reëntered the apartment I found him weeping and addressing an eloquent monologue to the picture of his departed father. Of course I intruded as short a time as possible on this scene and left him long alone so that he could "have his cry out."* In 1872, when an itinerant photographer made a tour of the Upper Missouri, going as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone, I had a ferrotype of my friend Rushing Eagle made, the pose of the head approximating as closely as possible that of Catlin's picture of Four Bears. I have carried this ferrotype around with me ever since, and quite recently I have had it copied with admirable fidelity by the Moss Engraving Company, of New York ("Mosstype"). I desire here to call attention to this picture (Pl. CXLII) in connection with Catlin's portrait of the elder chief taken forty years earlier, and for this reason I introduced a copy of a portion (Pl. CXL) of Catlin's etching of Four Bears, which latter is a full-length portrait. The old men of the tribe told me that Rushing Eagle was the image of his father. Such a great resemblance does not appear in the etching; there is a general likeness, but taking feature for feature there is much dissimilarity. Remembering that Catlin's original pictures of the Indians were oil paintings, and that the etchings were but copies, I determined to examine the original which now hangs with the rest of Catlin's collection on the south wall of this hall. I have compared it with the etching and with the picture of Rushing Eagle. It is evident that the etching is not a careful copy of the oil painting and that the latter bears a greater resemblance to the picture of Rushing Eagle than the former. In the painting the line which marks the anterior border of the cheek comes in a straight line down to the angle of the mouth as in the face of Rushing Eagle. The etching shows a mouth of classic curves; the oil painting represents a well-formed but unconventional mouth like that seen in the accompanying Mosstype. The jaw in the painting, like that in the Mosstype, is heavier than in the etching. In both the etching and the painting the eye seems set unnaturally far back.

In comparing the etching, or even the original painting, with the por-

* This account has previously appeared in the "American Antiquarian" for September, 1888.

trait of Rushing Eagle, we must remember that Catlin's pictures were necessarily hasty sketches, in which he sought rather to "catch a likeness" than to copy the face with painstaking exactness, and we must also bear in mind the great difference to be observed between portraits of our own historic men painted by different artists, under different circumstances, and at different periods of life. Often in comparing such portraits we recognize in them a common subject, only by some prominent feature or by the accessories of dress.

In the picture of Rushing Eagle some expression of sadness or melancholy may be detected, which is not to be seen in the portraits of his father and, closely as this engraving copies its original, the sad expression is still more pronounced in the ferrotype. Possibly the difference results from the failure on the part of the portrait painter to transfer the mournful glance to his canvas; but if it is inherent in the living models we need not wonder. Four Bears, when Catlin knew him, was a leader of a happy, well-fed, and prosperous people, while his son, when he sat before the camera, was one of a starved and oppressed remnant, whose horoscope grew darker from day to day.

Pl. CXLII represents the face of an old chief of the Minnetarees, a neighbor and friend of Four Bears, whose hair swept the ground when his tall form stood erect. This is pronounced a wonderful likeness by all who remember the original. As his descendants were mostly females and quite numerous, the demonstrations of recognition and grief over this picture were much more notable than over that of Four Bears.

Pl. CXLIII is a reproduction of his much-copied portrait of the famous Iroquois chief whose name is thus mentioned by Fitz Greene Halleck:

Thy name is princely, though no poet's magic,
 Could make *Red Jacket* grace an English rhyme,
 Unless he had a genius for the tragic,
 And introduced it into pantomime.

The artist indulged him in the wish he expressed, "that he might be seen standing on the table rock at the falls of Niagara, about which place he thought his spirit would linger after he was dead."

Perhaps it was this portrait that Halleck, in the poem already quoted, referred to when he exclaimed:

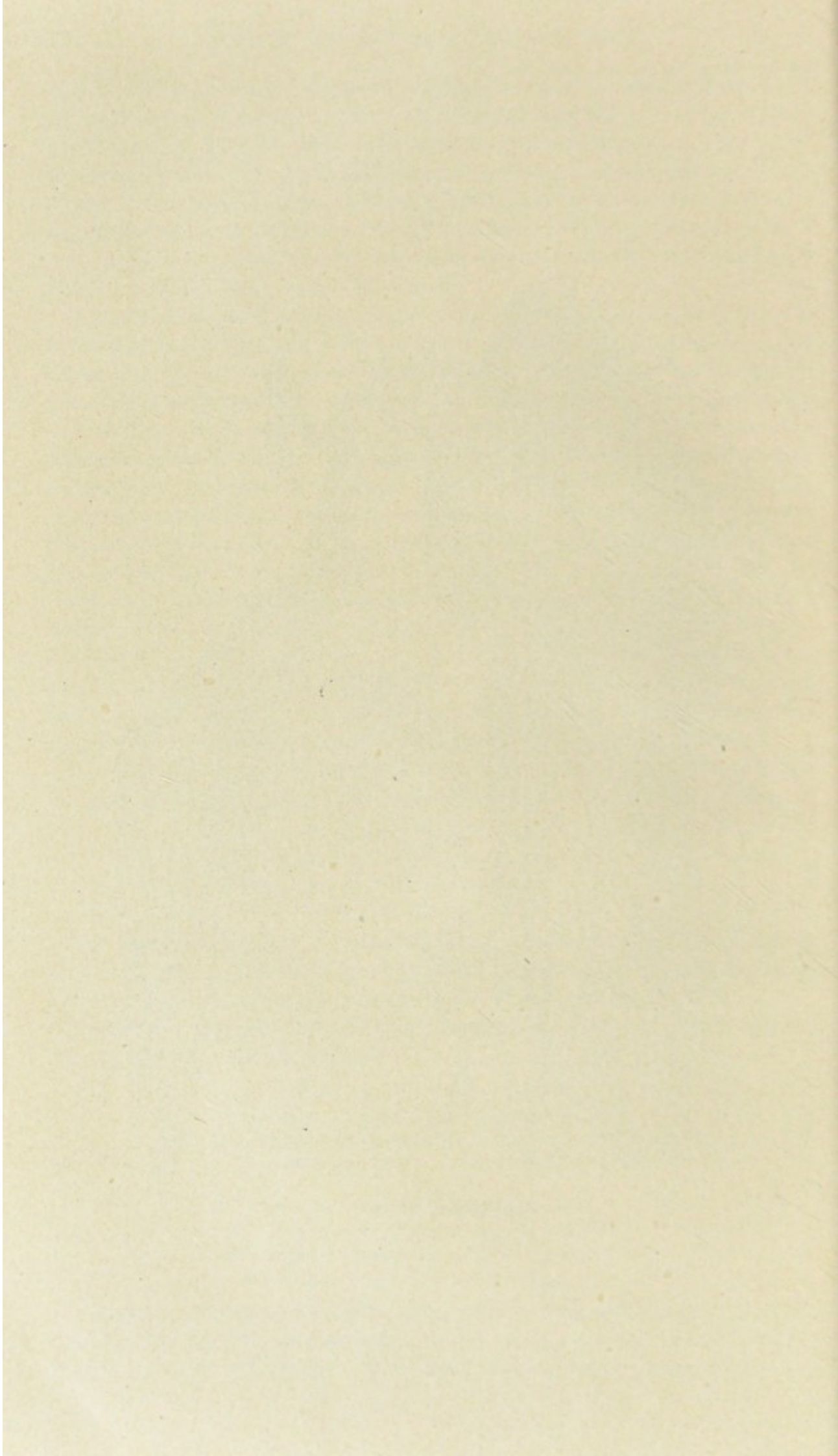
If he were with me, King of Tuscarora,
 Gazing as I, upon thy portrait now,
 In all its medaled, fringed, and beaded glory,
 Its eyes' dark beauty and its thoughtful brow—

Its brow half martial and half diplomatic,
 Its eye upsoaring, like an eagle's wings;
 Well might he boast that we, the democratic,
 Oustrival Europe—even in our kings.

"Red Jacket" was, however, but a white man's nickname. Had the poet bethought him of the true Indian name he might have found it better suited to his verse. This name was Sagoyewatha, or Keeper

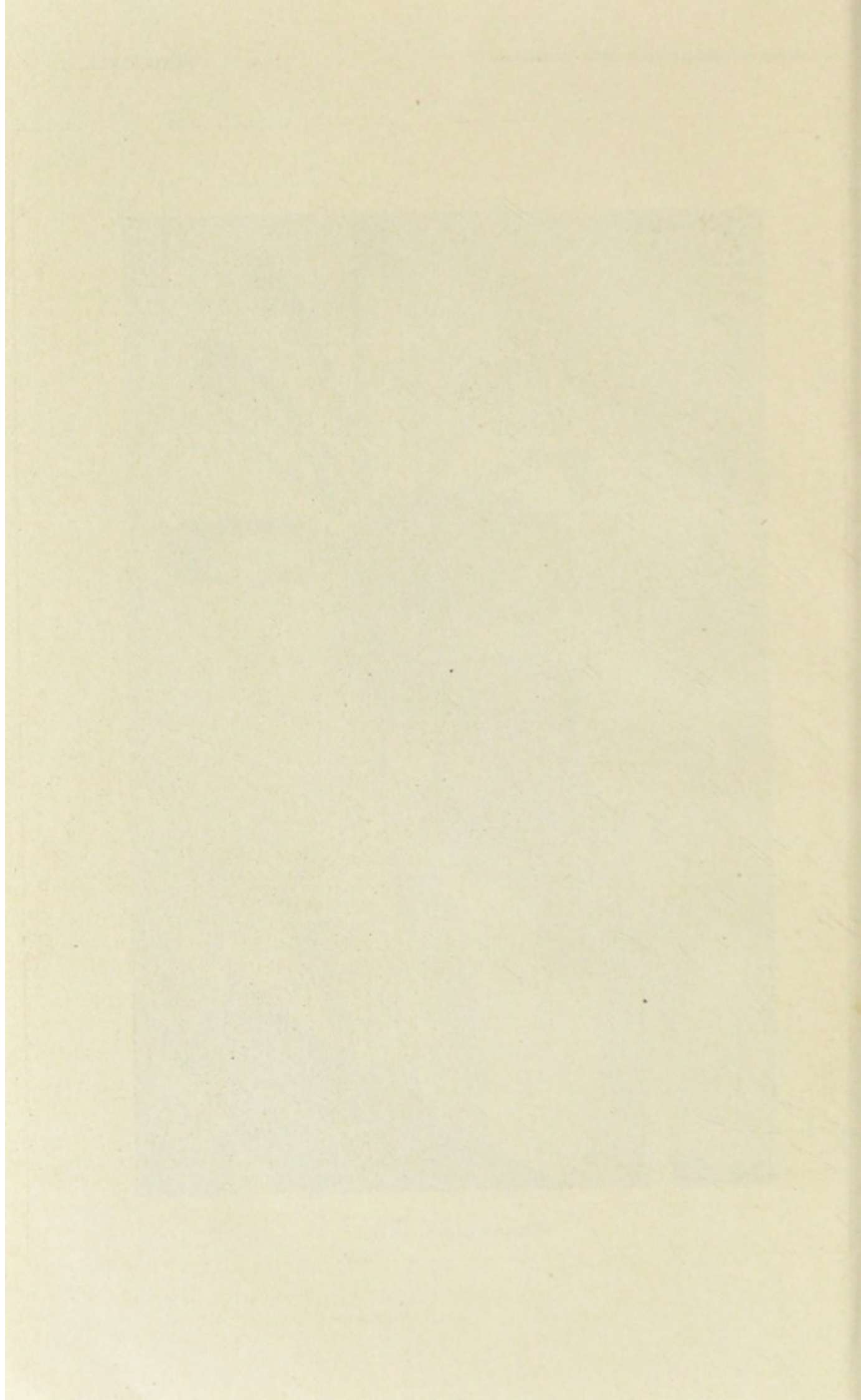


FOUR BEARS, 1832.





RUSHING EAGLE, 1872.



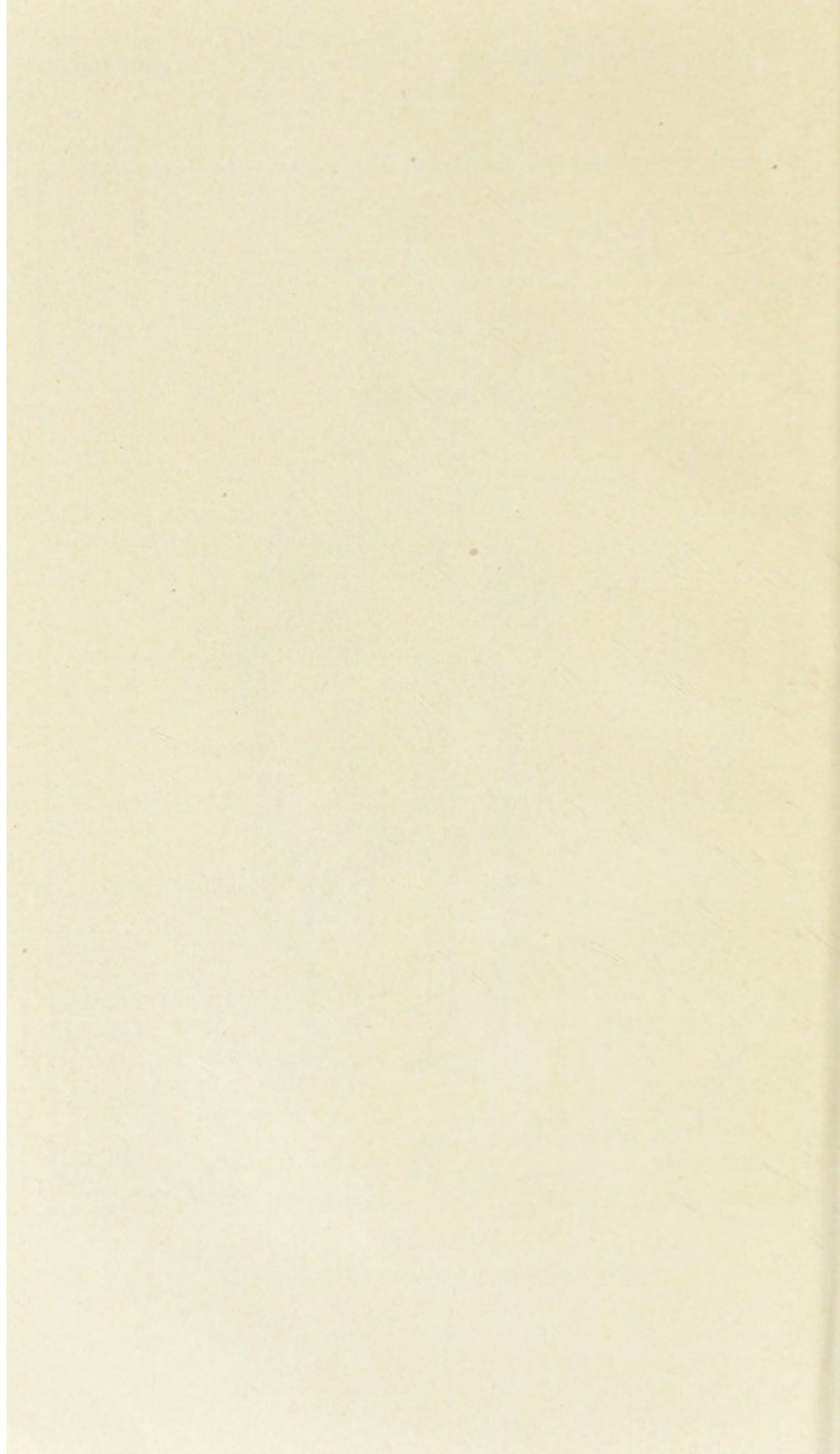


BLACK MOCCASIN, CHIEF OF THE MINNETAREES.
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 46.)



RED JACKET.

(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 55.)



Awake. He was so called because within the sounds of his eloquent voice sleep was impossible.

In Pl. CXLIV is seen the sad face of the young Seminole fighter, Osceola, who made himself notorious in the third decade of this century, and ended his sanguinary career a prisoner at Fort Moultrie, when but little over thirty years of age.

The picture to the left is from Catlin's canvas, painted while the subject was a prisoner. The picture on the right is from a bust in the National Museum which has for its basis Osceola's death-mask. An interesting difference is to be observed between these two pictures. Osceola, on his father's side, was the grandson of a Welshman, and as such inherited the name of Powell. In Catlin's portrait the European element in the features is more pronounced. In the bust from the death-mask it is the Indian element which is the more prominent. This is largely due no doubt to the shrinkage of the tissues of the face during the fatal illness, which caused the eyes to sink and the bony frame of the physiognomy to become more marked.

Among the portraits are two of Keokuk (one on foot, as shown in Pl. CXLV and one on horseback), a celebrated Sauk chief, from whom the present city of Keokuk, in Iowa, is named, and whose bust now occupies a place in the Capitol; one of Black Hawk (Pl. CXLVI), whose name is given to one of the severest wars our pioneers ever experienced, against whose forces Abraham Lincoln served in his youth as a volunteer private; and many others of great historic value.

I now come to consider four pictures in the gallery which have given rise to more controversy and comment than all the rest of the work combined, and which were at once his glory and his misfortune. These are his pictures of a certain religious ceremony of the Mandans called Okeepa. They were his glory because in them he depicts one of the most extraordinary rites that the eye of civilized man has ever witnessed, and because they were the first pictorial representations ever made of the esoteric work of an Indian medicine lodge. His description of these rites is no less wonderful and faithful than his pictures. They were his misfortune because the scenes he described and painted were so unusual that they were discredited by his jealous scientific contemporaries, and such doubts were cast upon his work as to interfere with the sale of his gallery in France, and later in the United States. Mr. Schoolcraft was the official ethnographer in those days, and his dictum seemed to settle all questions. In his immense six-volumed compilation entitled "Information respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States," he generally ignores the great work of Catlin, but he publishes a letter dated June 28, 1852, by a "colonel" who was superintendent of Indian affairs in those days. The letter of this "colonel" indicates throughout a most superficial second-hand knowledge of the subject of which he treats, and the only reference he makes to Catlin's labors is in the

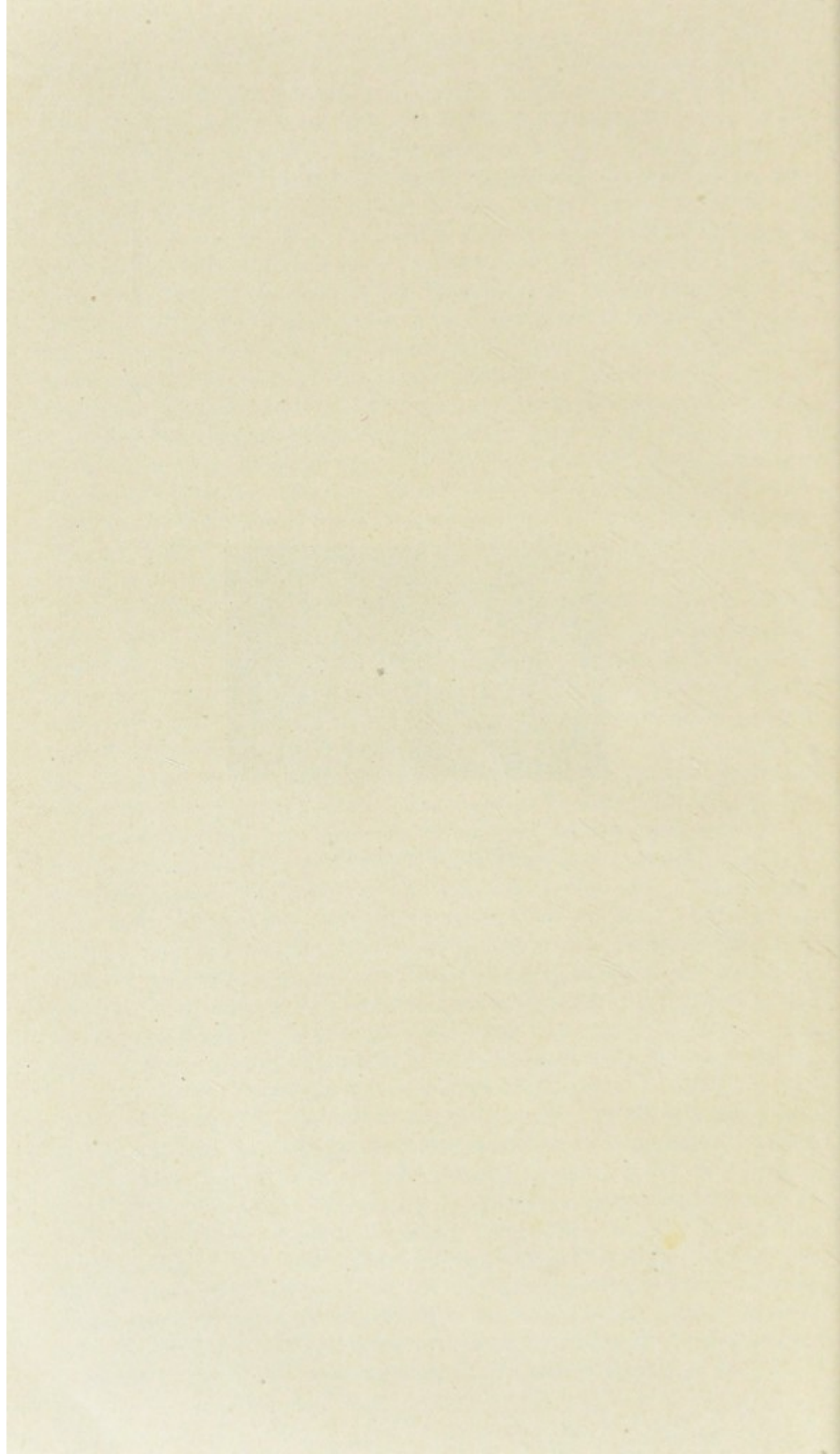
closing sentence, which reads as follows: "The scenes described by Mr. Catlin existed almost entirely in the fertile imagination of that gentleman." Thus by a pebble from the sling of a pigmy was our giant of ethnography felled. And doubts are still cast on this work, although witnesses abound who testify to its verity. Catlin took pains to secure the certificates of Mr. Kipp and his assistants, and he published these certificates. The year following Catlin's visit, the Prince of Wied sojourned a whole winter among the Mandans, and, through interpreters, obtained accounts of the ceremonies, corroborating those of Catlin. All this was on record before Schoolcraft's day, but was not sufficient to stay the publication of the quoted calumny. Since then (in 1860), twenty-eight years after Catlin wrote, and twenty-two years after the Mandans were supposed by Catlin to have been exterminated, Lieut. H. E. Maynadier, of our Army, witnessed a part of the Okeepa and describes it much as Catlin did. But there is still another and a later witness and this witness has the honor of addressing you this evening. The portion of the ceremony which I saw and am prepared to testify to will presently be illustrated.

The picture which is now before us (Pl. CXLVII) shows the inside of the medicine lodge as it appeared during the first three days and part of the fourth day of the ceremony. The young candidates for warriorhood are seen reclining around the edge of the apartment. Above each man's head are his shield and weapons and the walls are decorated with fascicles of green willows. On a light frame, toward the back of the lodge, is seen a sacred object, the holy of holies of this lodge, whose appearance and nature Catlin was unable to discover. Under the frame are the knife and skewers to be used in the cruel manner described later. In the center of the foreground is the circular fireplace; on either side of the latter are the ancient turtle-shaped drums filled with water, so say the shamans, from the four quarters of the world. Behind the fireplace, the master of the lodge with upraised hand invokes the mysterious powers. These young candidates are preparing themselves by fasting and praying for the appalling tortures they are about to undergo. For four days and three nights they neither eat nor drink. There are a goodly number of these candidates, the annual crop of young men in those, the halcyon days of the tribe.

In this picture (Pl. CXLVIII) we see the plaza or central assembly place of the old Mandan village of Metutahankush as it appeared in 1832. This village stood near the site of the present town of Mandan, North Dakota. To the left we see the medicine lodge, with four poles in front surrounded by sacred effigies and, in the center of the square, a cylindrical wooden structure, resembling a hogshead, which was emblematic of the ark in which the Mandan counterpart of Noah was saved from the flood. Forty years after Catlin's time, when the remnant of the Mandans had established themselves in a new village sixty miles from the old one and resumed their tribal ceremonies, they built



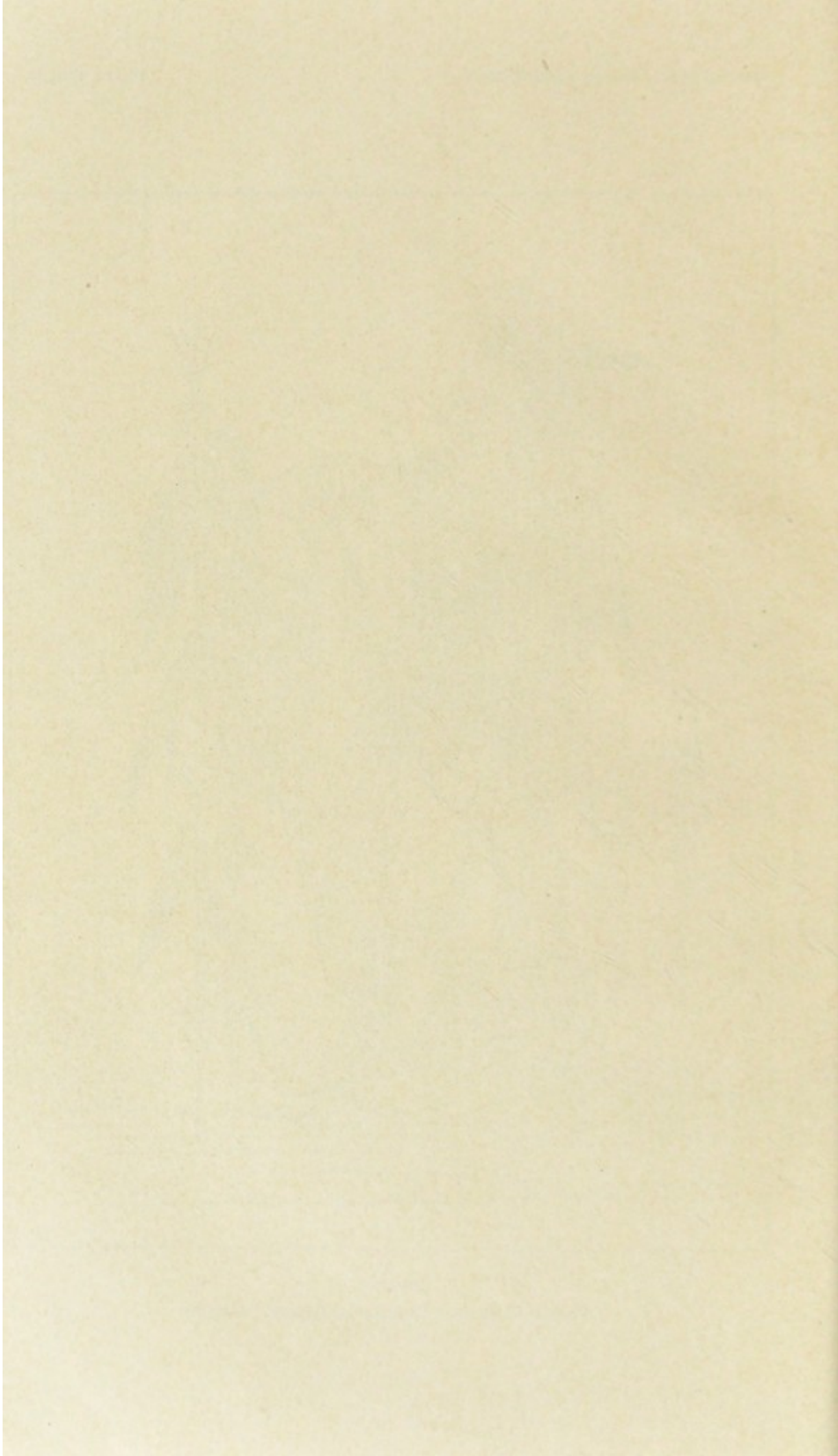
PORTRAITS OF OSCEOLA.

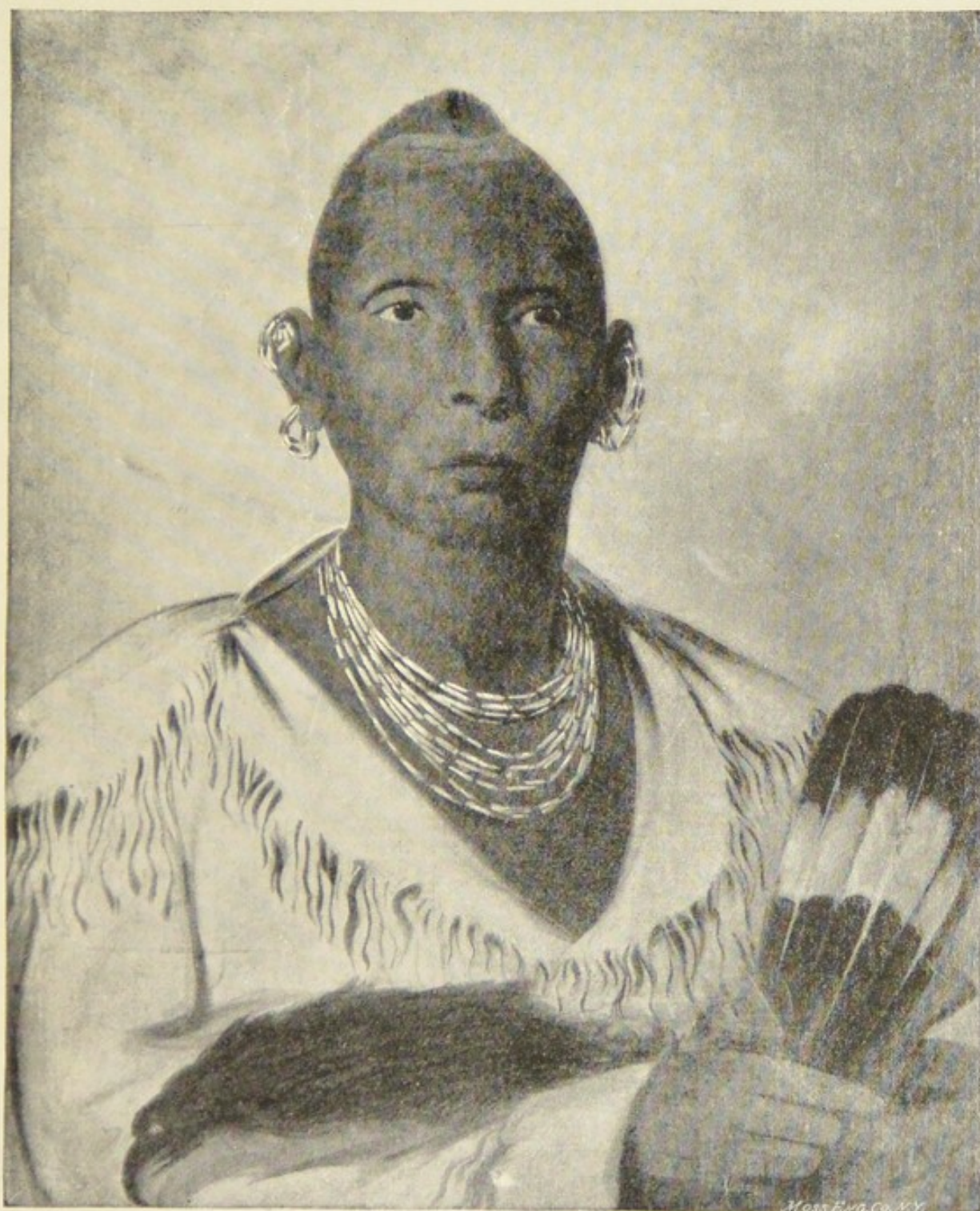




KEOKUK.

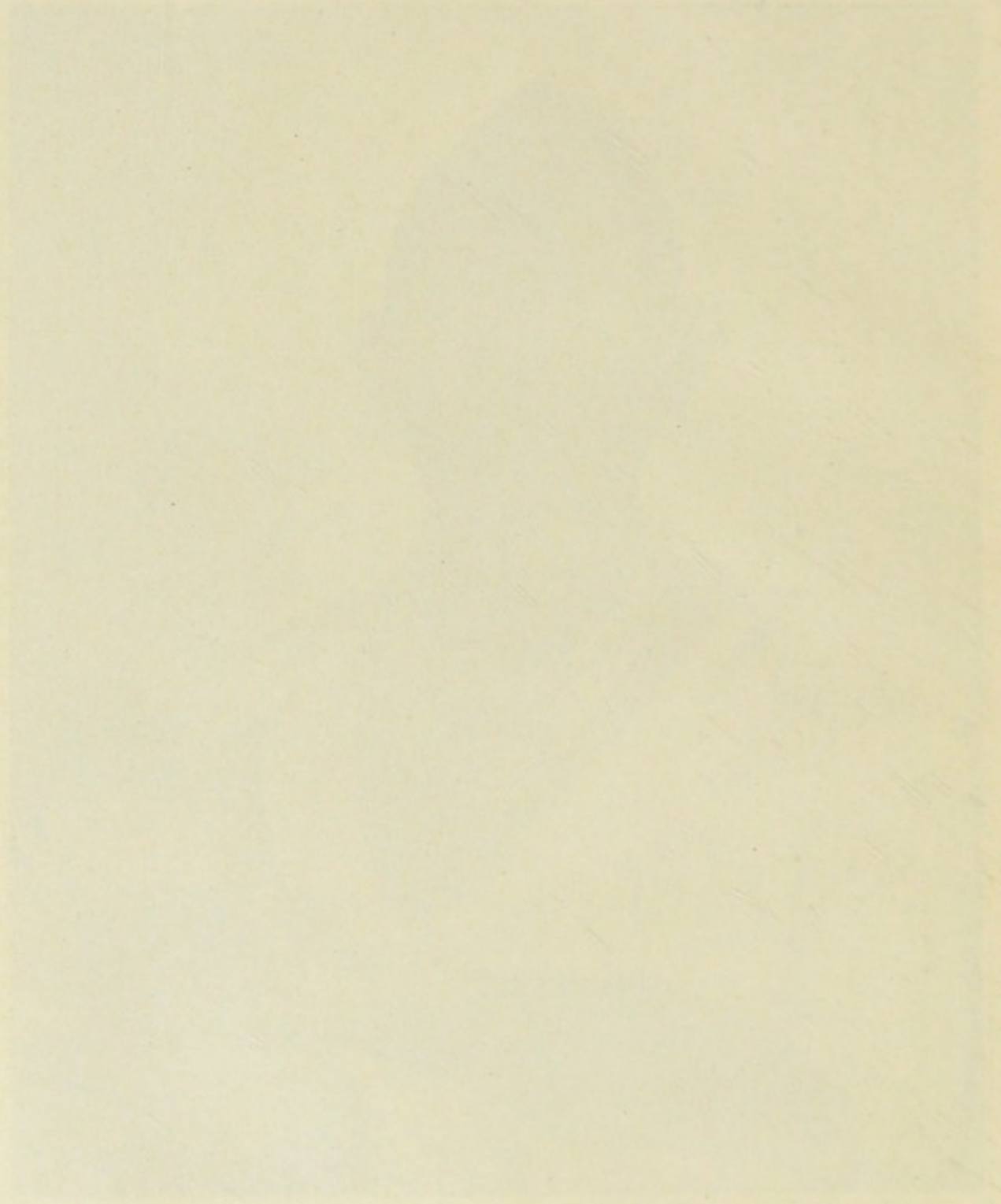
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 10.)

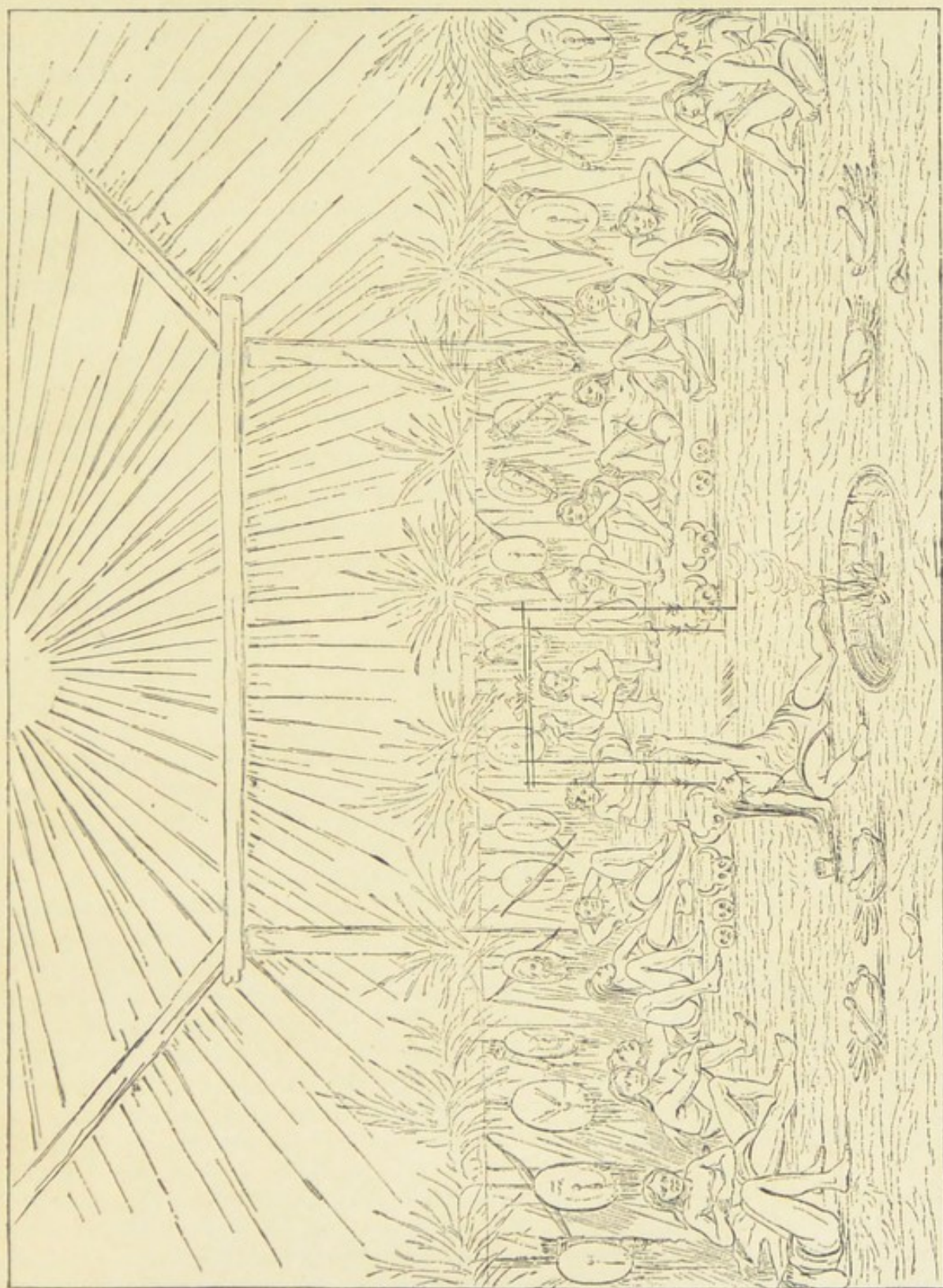




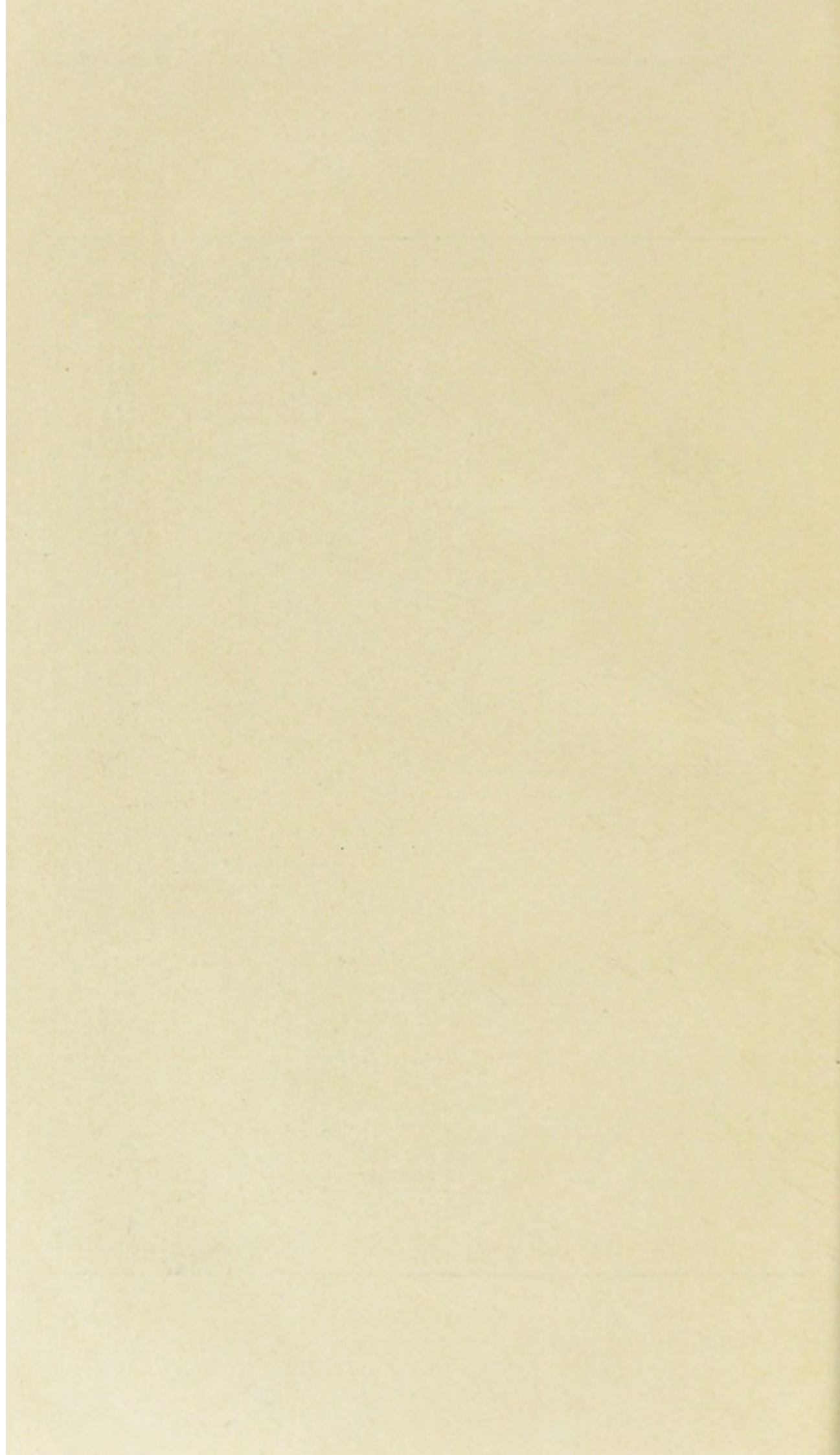
BLACK HAWK.

(From painting in the U. S. National Museum by George Catlin.)





INTERIOR OF MANDAN MEDICINE LODGE DURING FIRST THREE DAYS OF THE OKEEPA.
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 92.)



just such another ark and erected similar poles and effigies. The picture of the old village plaza would have done without alteration for that of the new.

While the youths are starving within, their kindred outside are not idle. They are performing the buffalo dance, a rite rich in Indian symbolism, to insure the increase and preservation of the bison. A most successful dance it was, too, in attaining its object before the introduction of powder and ball. This picture represents the dance at the moment of the advent of the evil one, who, painted in black, is seen entering the arena on the left.

Knowing from observation that in the waxworks the chamber of horrors is the most crowded part of the establishment, and that a fair proportion of the crowd are ladies and children, I have little hesitancy in exhibiting the next picture. What has gone before is but child's play; now we come to the earnest work of the ceremony.

With this preparation, I now place before you the scene in the medicine lodge on the fourth day (Pl. CXLIX). Around the wall in this picture are seen some of the fasting candidates who are waiting for their dread turn to come. Other young men who have passed the ordeal have gone outside to participate in the last dance, which will next be exhibited (Pl. CL). To the right is seen a youth on whom the torturers have just commenced operations. The following is Catlin's description, somewhat condensed, of this portion of the rites.

An inch or more of the flesh on each shoulder or each breast was taken up between the thumb and finger, and the knife which had been ground sharp on both edges and then hacked to make it produce as much pain as possible, was forced through the flesh below the fingers, and being withdrawn, was followed with a skewer from the man who held a bunch of such in his left hand and was ready to force them through the wound. There were then two cords lowered from the top of the lodge (by men stationed outside) which were fastened to these splints or skewers, and they instantly began to haul the victim up. He was thus raised until he was suspended from the ground, where he rested until a knife and a skewer were passed through the flesh or integuments in a similar manner on each side below the shoulder, below the elbow, on the thigh, and below the knees.

He was then instantly raised with the cords until the weight of his body was suspended by them, and then while the blood was streaming down his limbs the bystanders hung upon the splints his shield, bow, quiver, etc., and (in many instances) the skull of a buffalo. When these things were all adjusted he was raised higher by the cords until those weights all swung clear from the ground. In this plight he at once became appalling and frightful to look at. The flesh, to support the weight, was raised six or eight inches by the skewers, and the head sunk forward on the breast or thrown backward in a much more frightful condition.

The unflinching fortitude with which every one of them bore this part of the torture surpassed credulity; each one as the knife passed through the flesh sustained an unchangeable countenance, and several of them, seeing me making sketches, beckoned me to look at their faces, which I watched all through this horrid operation without being able to detect anything but the pleasantest smiles as they looked me in the eye, while I could hear the knife rip through the flesh and feel enough of it myself to start involuntary and uncontrollable tears over my cheeks.

The next operation on each suspended candidate is thus described :

Surrounded by imps and demons as they appear, a dozen or more, who seem devising means for his exquisite agony, gather around him when one of the number advances toward him in a sneering manner and commences turning him round with a pole. This done gently at first is gradually increased, when the brave fellow whose proud spirit can control its agony no longer, bursts out in the most lamentable and heart rending cries that the human voice is capable of producing, crying forth a prayer to the Great Spirit to support and protect him in this great trial. In this condition he is turned faster and faster until, by fainting, his voice falters and he hangs apparently a lifeless corpse. When brought to this alarming and frightful condition, when his tongue is distended from his mouth, and his medicine bag, which he has affectionately and superstitiously clung to with his left hand, has dropped to the ground, the signal is given to the men on top of the lodge, when they carefully lower him to the ground.

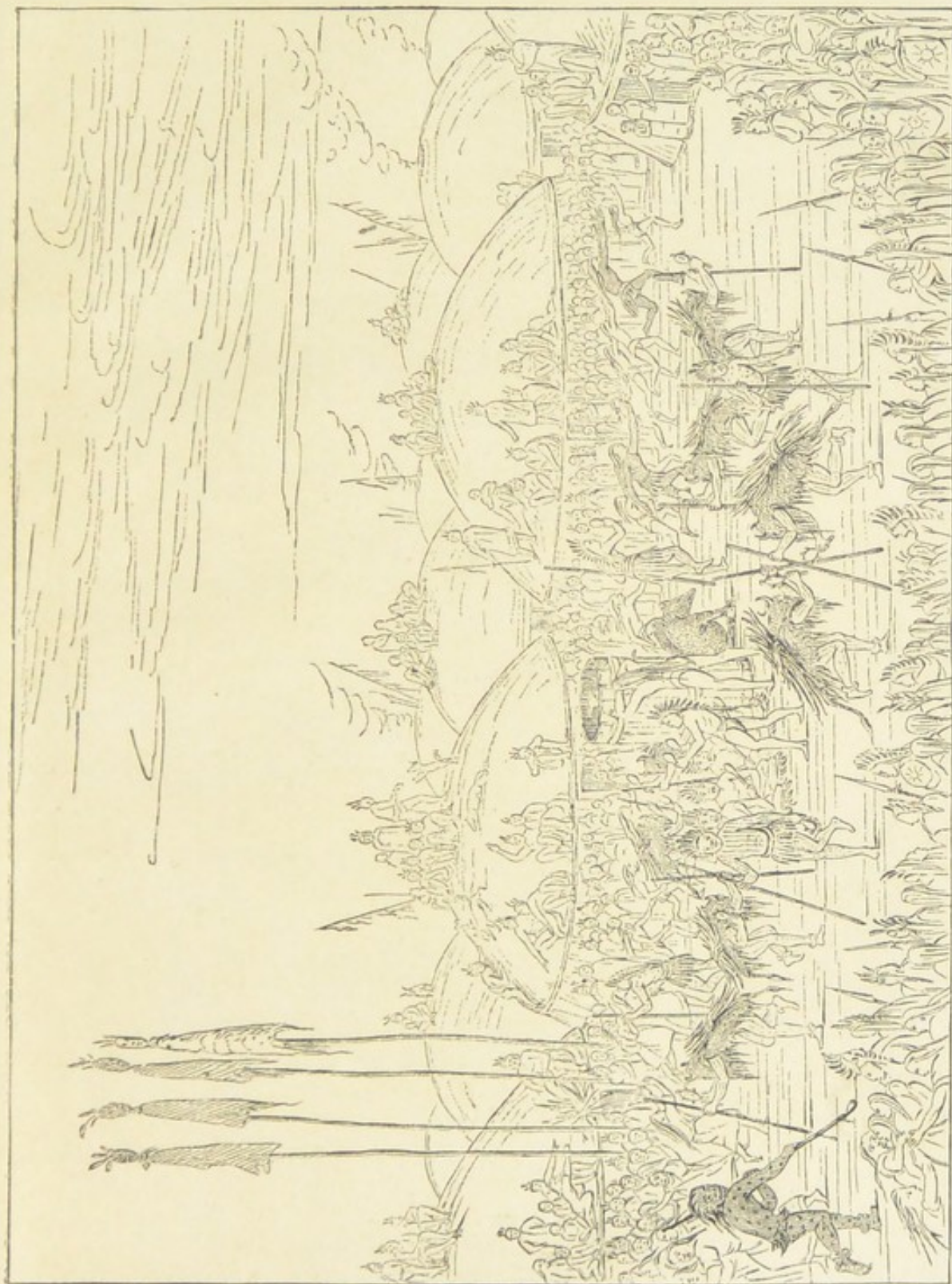
In this helpless condition he lies like a loathsome corpse to look at. One of the bystanders advances and pulls out the pins from the breasts or shoulders, thereby disengaging him from the cords by which he has been hung up, but leaving all the others with their weights hanging to his flesh.

In this condition he lies for six or eight minutes, until he gets strength to rise, for no one is allowed to assist him.

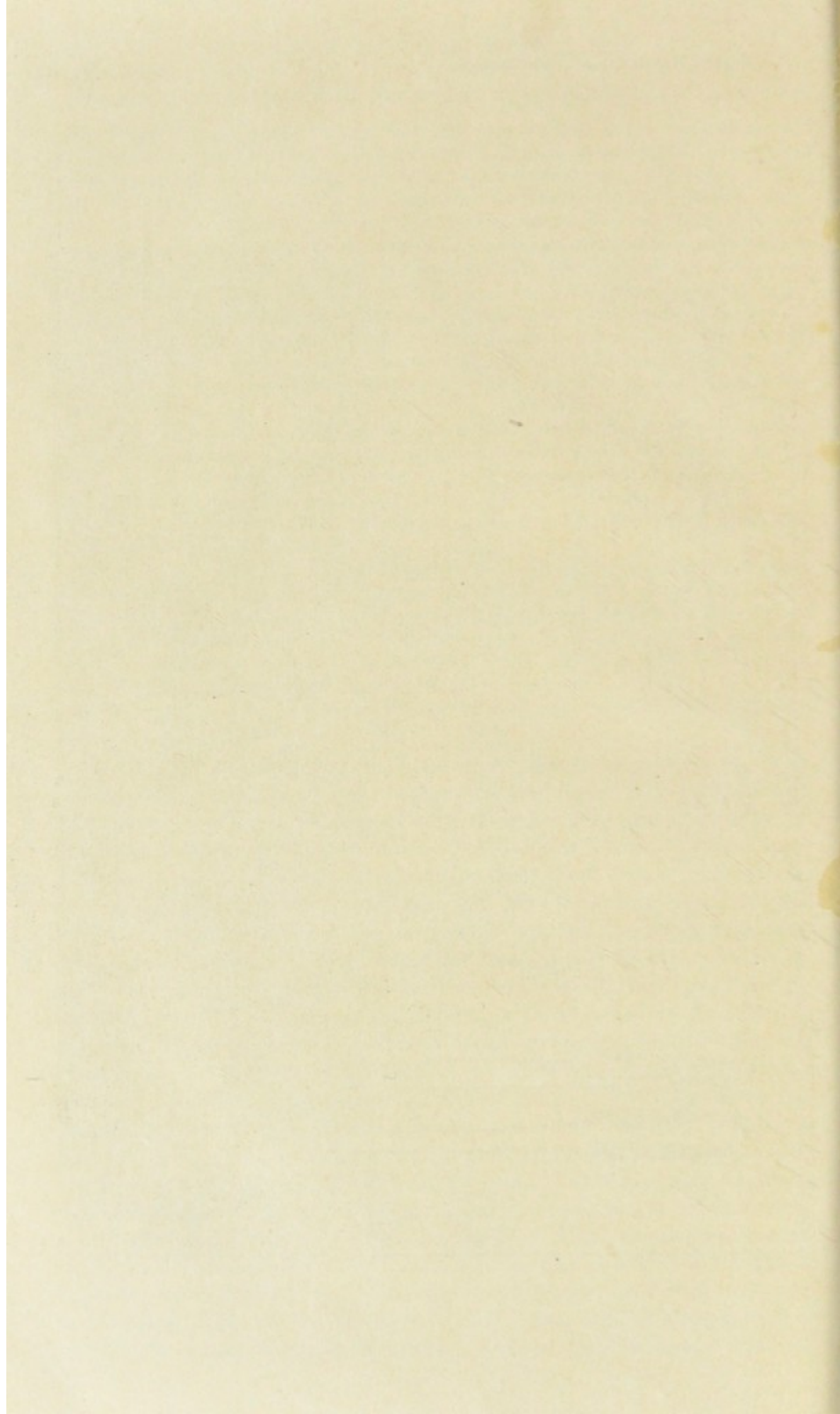
As soon as he is able to drag his body around the lodge he crawls, with the weights still hanging to his body, to where an Indian, hatchet in hand, sits behind a dried buffalo skull, and here, in the most earnest and humble manner, holding up the little finger of the left hand to the Great Spirit, he expresses to him in a brief speech his willingness to sacrifice it; then he lays it on the buffalo skull, and the other chops it off near the hand with a blow of the hatchet.

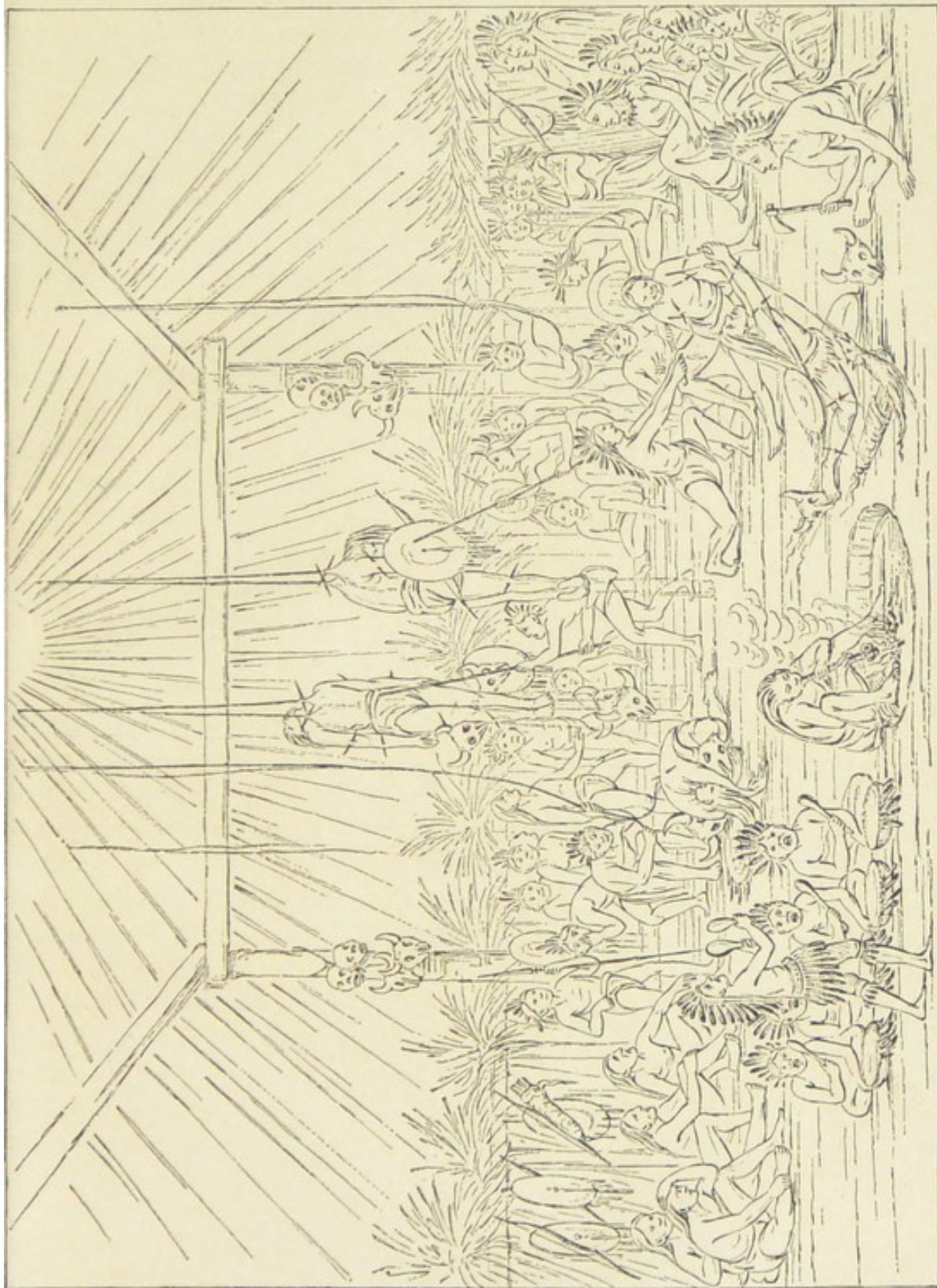
Sometimes more than one finger is sacrificed, and no treatment of the wound is permitted.

As I have intimated before, I have witnessed something of these ceremonies. I had been some years on the upper Missouri before I became aware of the existence of such rites, and my first knowledge of them was secured through the perusal of Catlin's works. When I read of them I asked some white men who had lived many years in the country and in the same village with the Mandans, but they declared they knew nothing of them, and they even doubted the trustworthiness of the pictures. Had I been one of the doubting know-alls, how easily could I have cast another stone at the prostrate Catlin. Such is the value of negative evidence. But in time I found some old Mandans to consult. These put their astonished hands over their open mouths and groaned in wonder when they beheld the etchings. I was promised a vision of the ceremonies on the following summer if I were still in the country. Some time next year, the summer of 1869, I was duly notified that the ceremonies had begun, but no one could have told in advance when they were to begin, for none knew but the medicine men, and they were not supposed to know when *Numak-machani*, the Mandan Adam, would visit the village and open the rites. I lived then some sixteen miles from the Mandan village, and was so hampered with my duties when the news arrived that I was unable to set out until after midnight on the third night of the ceremonies, and I was able to witness only a part of the fourth day's performance. Among other things, I saw the

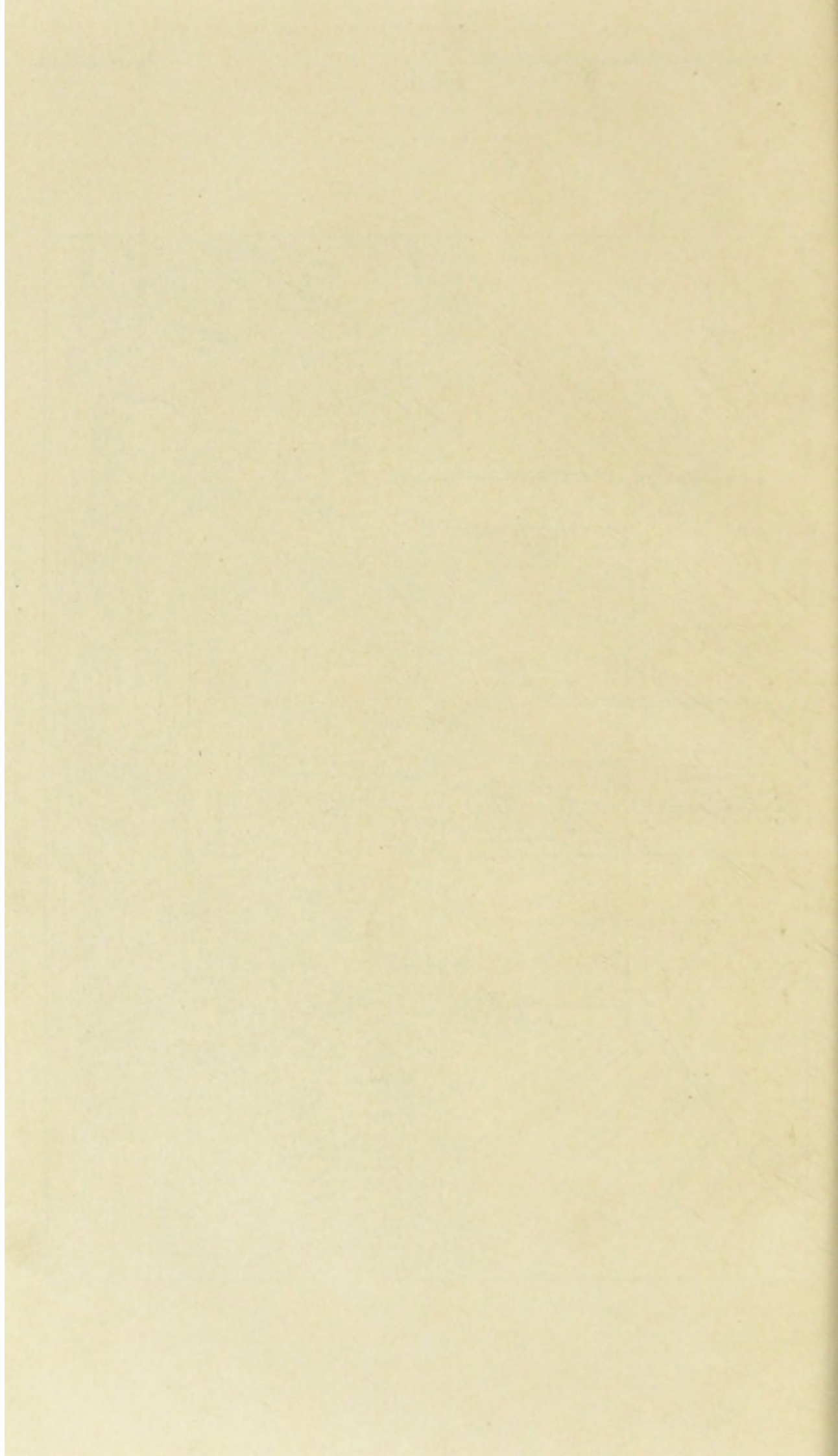


BULL DANCE. MANDAN CEREMONY OF THE OKEEPA.
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 93.)





CUTTING SCENE. MANDAN CEREMONY OF THE OKEEPA.
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 94.)



dance called the last dance (Pl. CL), and to the accuracy of Catlin's description and delineation of this I am prepared to testify.

After the youths have been tortured in the lodge, as described, they are led out of it with the weights, buffalo skulls, etc., hanging to their flesh. Around the big canoe (*i. e.*, the wooden cylinder) is formed a circle of young men, who hold wreaths of willow boughs between them, and run around with all possible violence, yelling as loud as they can.

The young fellows who have been tortured are then led forward and each one has assigned to him two athletic, fresh young men (their bodies singularly painted), who step up to him, one on each side, take him by a leathern strap tied around the wrist, and run around outside the other circle with all possible speed, forcing him forward until he faints. Then they continue to drag him, with his face in the dirt, until the weights are all disengaged by tearing the flesh out. The skewers are never withdrawn lengthwise. They then drop him and fly through the crowd away upon the prairie, as if they were guilty of some enormous crime and were fleeing from summary vengeance. The victim lies to all appearance a corpse, unaided, until his strength returns, and he walks home to his lodge, where he is at last kindly cared for and fed, and his sufferings are at an end.

There are many more extraordinary occurrences in the ceremonies, for which I must refer the curious to Catlin's works.* He tells us that when he saw the rites some forty-five or fifty youths submitted themselves to the torture. When I beheld them there were but four candidates, and two of these were members of other tribes who, for some reason, had chosen to go through the Mandan initiation. Such was the change wrought in less than four decades.

Mr. Catlin's artistic labors did not end with the formation of this gallery. After it had passed from his hands he again set out on his journeys and traveled extensively in North and South America, making sketches as he went. The materials collected in these later wanderings are, I understand, in the hands of his heirs. I trust the time may soon come when they will be added to the more famous collection which we now possess.

The history of this collection is as romantic and eventful as that of its author, and the preservation of the collection to the present day seems little less than providential.

The sketches, taken in desolate and hostile lands, were borne on horseback over dim trails, or in frail canoes and bull-boats along the currents of treacherous streams, before they reached places of comparative safety in the white settlements.

When, in 1837, after eight years of travel and labor, the collection was

* "Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians." 10th edition, London, 1866, vol. 1, p. 155 *et seq.* Okeepa, a Religious Ceremony and other Customs of the Mandans. Philadelphia, 1867; and other works of Catlin.

nearly completed, it began its tour of the civilized world, only to encounter dangers more imminent than those which threatened it in the wilderness.

In the years 1837-'39 it made the tour of the then principal cities of the Union. The present is not its first appearance in the national capital. It knew Washington in the days of its dingy youth, long ere it gave promise of becoming the most beautiful capital in the world.

When in 1839 the collection made its first voyage across the Atlantic it encountered a storm which was weathered with difficulty. During the twelve succeeding years it was exhibited in London and many of the smaller cities of the British Isles, in France, and in Belgium.

In France it so pleased the king, Louis Philippe, who had traveled as a fugitive in America in earlier days and seen much of the Indians, that he gave it a place in the palace of the Louvre, and began to consider the propriety of purchasing it. Here it might be supposed it had at last reached an asylum, but, as subsequent events showed, it never was in greater danger than when established in these princely quarters. Soon afterwards the revolution of 1848 broke out; the citizen king, assuming the modest name of Mr. Smith, fled to England, and Catlin was only too glad to rescue his collection and follow his royal patron across the channel.

Landed in England, perils of another kind awaited it. Mr. Catlin speculated unwisely and the collection was seized for debt in 1852.

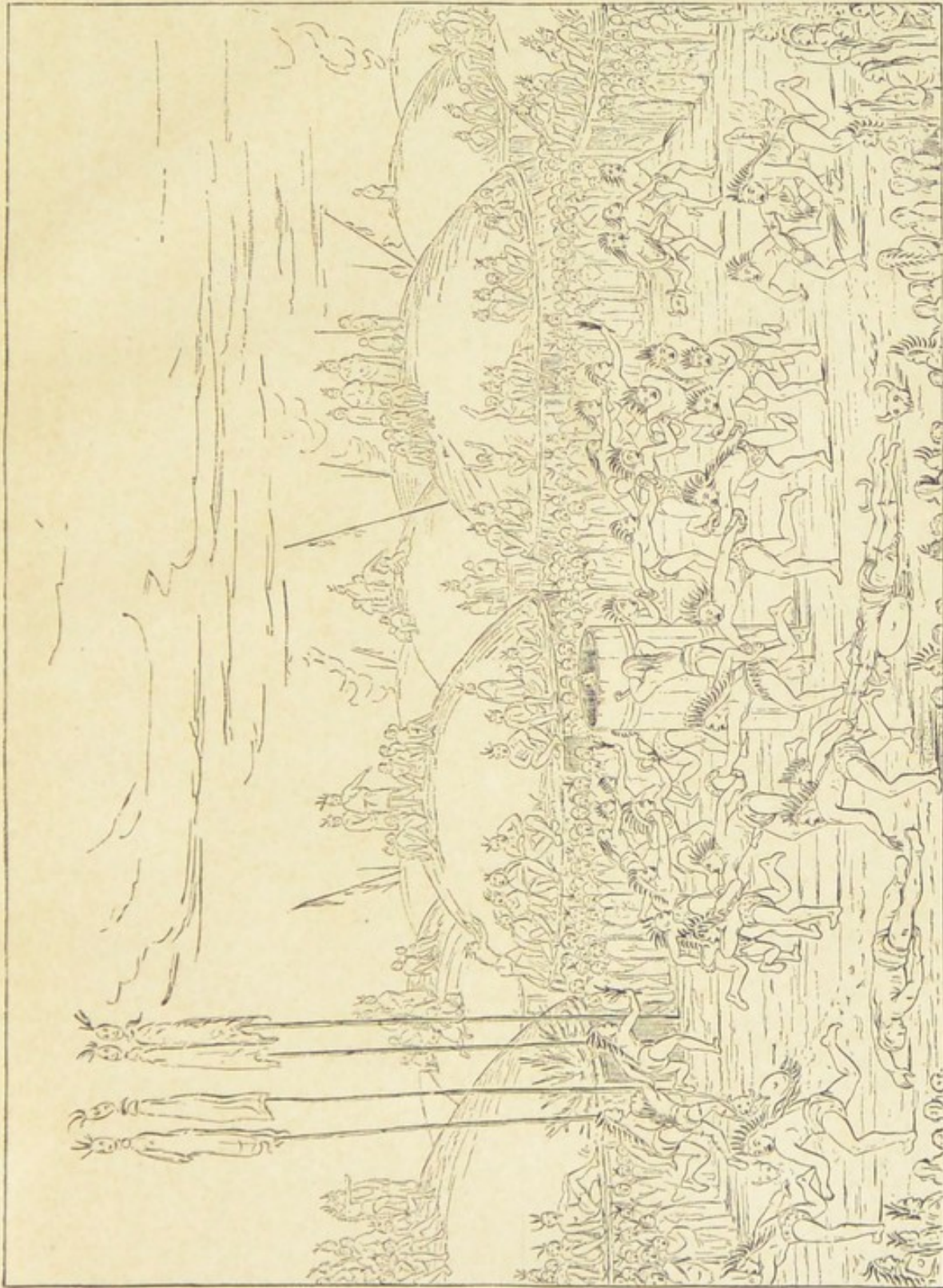
Rescued from the hands of the creditors by a generous citizen of Philadelphia, who happened to be in England at the time, Mr. Joseph Harrison, it again crossed the ocean to what we might call its native land; here it lay for years in different lofts and storehouses in Philadelphia. While in this ignoble seclusion it twice ran the risk of destruction by fire and was, with difficulty, saved. Some of the canvas still shows the defacing marks of smoke and flame and of the waters used to extinguish the fires.

For more than a quarter of a century it thus lay hidden until, in the year 1879, it was presented to the nation by Mrs. Harrison and brought for the second and, let us hope, the last time to the city of Washington.

Mr. Thomas Donaldson, through whose instrumentality largely the collection was secured for the people, tells us, "Mr. Catlin first offered his gallery to the Smithsonian Institution in 1846; thirty-five years afterwards it found a permanent lodgment in the same institution after vicissitudes and misfortunes hardly equaled."*

And here it rests at last, in an isolated fireproof building, in a city which has no mob element to threaten, in the possession of a sovereign people whose property can not be seized for debt, as nearly safe from danger as anything human can well be. Let us hope that it will long remain to instruct and entertain the multitudes who will in future visit this hall, and to record a stage of human development and an era in the history of our land which have passed totally and forever.

**Op. cit.*, p. 6.



THE LAST DANCE. MANDAN CEREMONY OF THE OKEEPA.
(From Donaldson's "Catlin Indian Gallery," Plate 95.)



