

what direction the command was travelling and the side on which you had left it? You knew that the sun would set in the west, and that as you faced it, north was to the right and south to the left—surely you could then steer a course, even if you could not while the sun was vertical.”

Gentle reader, you have never been lost on a wide ocean of prairies, unskilled in border life, and little gifted with the power of first adopting a course to follow and then not deviating from it. You must recollect that there, as on the wide ocean, you find no trees, no friendly landmarks, to guide you—all is a wide waste of eternal sameness. *To be lost*, as I and others have experienced, has a complex and fearful meaning. It is not merely to stray from your friends, your path, but from yourself. With your way you lose your presence of mind. You attempt to reason, but the rudder and compass of your reflective faculties are gone. Self-confidence, too, is lost—in a word all is lost, except a maniacal impulse to despair, that is peculiar and indescribable.

In my case fate, fortune, good luck—call it by what name you may—stepped in to my assistance. While upon one of the highest rolls of the prairie I resolved to proceed in a certain direction, and, if possible, to keep it without variation. Whether I did so or not I am unable to say—I only know that after travelling at a rapid pace, it may be some five miles, I suddenly found myself upon the brow of a high and steep declivity, overlooking a narrow but beautiful valley, through which a small creek was winding. I had examined the prairies in every direction, during my short ride, until my eyes ached from over-straining, yet had not for a moment allowed my horse to slacken his pace. I now paused

to examine the valley before me. The reader may judge my feelings when, after a hasty glance, I discovered the white tops of the wagons, far off in the distance to the right, slowly winding their way down a gentle slope into the valley. Never was the sight of friendly sail more welcome to the eye of a shipwrecked mariner than was the appearance of those wagons to me, and I fairly laughed aloud at my good fortune.

Immediately in front of the spot where I had made this truly fortunate discovery the declivity was steep, amounting almost to a precipice, with craggy rocks jutting out in every direction. A few steps beyond, the descent, although rough, appeared less steep, and in such haste was I once more to reach the command that I put spurs to my horse and dashed headlong down. Scarcely had I proceeded twenty steps ere my horse snorted and jumped furiously aside, frightened by a rattlesnake lying almost directly in the path. Blind at the time, in all probability, it being in August, the snake did not give the well-known and frightful alarm until the feet of my horse were close upon him. Numbers of these poisonous reptiles, coiled among the rocks immediately around, soon joined in the alarm, and at the same time emitted an odour which was disagreeable in the extreme.\* If I had been frightened while lost upon the prairies, it was now my horse's turn to share a panic with me. With quick yet tremulous leaps he dashed down the craggy steep, and I was unable to restrain or check him until he had reached the smooth, grassy bottom in safety. How many snakes there were in this imme-

\* Every animal, with the single exception of the hog, has an instinctive fear of the rattlesnake, can scent them easily, and will fly at their approach with terror. The hog cares nothing for the reptiles, but on the contrary has been known to attack, kill, and devour them with avidity and impunity.

diate neighbourhood is more than I can tell—I did not stop to count or calculate; but if the lot had been purchased at five hundred, I honestly think the buyer never would have had reason to find fault with the reckoning. On looking back, I discovered a large hole or cave among the rocks, and near the path I had taken, which I had not seen before. This was probably the den or dwelling-place of the reptiles, and at the time when I passed along they were all out airing themselves in the sun. Half an hour's brisk trot brought me up with the command, which I found my companion had already rejoined. He did not know even that I had been lost until I informed him of my adventure. I said little about it, but inly resolved never to be caught out of sight of the command again.

Two or three rattlesnakes had been killed that night within our lines, stragglers, probably, from the den I had passed, and belated, or else too blind to find their way back. After falling asleep at night my dreams partook of anything but the agreeable. At one time I thought myself, like Mazeppa, beset on every side by ravenous wolves, grinning and snapping at me at every step. Next, I was suffering horribly from both hunger and thirst—my powder had all become spoiled by rain, and the clouds gave down no other than bitter water. Soon I was chased by a gang of bloodthirsty Indians, and to increase my fright my faithful horse suddenly lost half his speed. Anon, the prairie was covered in every direction with rattlesnakes, and at the next moment it was on fire, myself standing on a small unburned knoll, the flames rapidly approaching me in every direction. From these dreams I would awake with a start, the horrors of the night even exceeding those of the day which had preceded it. Right glad was I

when morning at length came to dissipate the annoying dreams.

After proceeding a short distance on our journey that morning, we encountered even a worse road than any over which we had travelled, if my memory serves me. We boxed the compass for several hours, going some ten or twelve miles to gain three on our course, but were finally fortunate enough to reach a high piece of table-land where the *mesquit*\* grass was fresh, and far better than any we had previously found. To this spot Carlos said the Mexicans frequently brought their sheep, on account of the superiority of the pasturage, and he also pointed in the direction of a large spring and creek of fresh water, which he said emptied into Red River a few miles to the north. Although no sign could be seen indicating water in the direction he assigned, his assertion proved correct; for after a travel of five or six miles a spring was found in the precise situation which he had described. More singular than this, he had frequently informed the men where plum-patches were to be found in the vicinity of our journey, and he was almost invariably correct. With all these corrob-

\* Whether this is a Mexican or Indian name for a particular kind of grass, found in great abundance on the great prairies of the West, I am unable to say. Cattle and horses are extremely fond of it, and it is very nourishing. There is a small, brambly bush of the same name, and also a tree about the size of a cherry or peach tree. The latter bears a pod containing beans, which are greedily devoured by horses and cattle, and are said to fatten them as well as grain. The Camanches make a species of meal from the beans, very palatable and nutritious, and the Mexicans also use them in making beer as well as sugar. When our provisions and coffee fell short, the men ate them raw in immense quantities, and also either roasted or boiled them. The wood makes the best of charcoal, throws out a great heat, and lasts a long time. The tree, as well as the small bush, has a long, sharp thorn. I have spelled the word *mesquit*, believing that to be the Spanish mode—it is pronounced *meskeet*. West of San Antonio there are immense groves of mesquit-trees, and the grass is also found there in several varieties.

orating circumstances, it cannot be wondered at that we all thought we were within a few days' march of the frontier Mexican settlements.

On encamping at night, fully convinced as the commissioners were of the truth of the statements made by Carlos, who said that San Miguel was not more than seventy-five or eighty miles distant, they determined upon sending Messrs. Howland, Baker, and Rosenberry forward to procure sugar, coffee, and breadstuffs, and consult with the inhabitants, more particularly with some of the principal men, as to the reception the expedition would probably meet. Howland had lived several years in Santa Fé and the vicinity, spoke Spanish fluently, and was well acquainted with all the leading inhabitants. He was a man of great intelligence, brave, and at the same time cautious. The party took with them but three days' provisions, and as large numbers of hostile Indians were known to infest the borders of New Mexico, they were to travel only by night, lying concealed during the day.

Had it not been for this circumstance alone, I should most certainly have accompanied this party; but I had a pack-mule with no inconsiderable wardrobe to take along, and to travel through an Indian country with such an encumbrance was deemed not only unsafe, but impracticable. So anxious was I to hasten my journey, that I was almost tempted to leave my mule, and take such articles only as I could carry on my horse; but my friends so strongly advised me to continue with the command that I relinquished the idea of accompanying them, much against my wishes. After circumstances proved, almost beyond a doubt, that the fact of my being compelled to remain with the command saved my

life.\* I was particularly anxious to hasten forward on more than one account. In the first place, the season was becoming far advanced, and I was in no little anxiety to prosecute my journey through the interior of Mexico, so as to reach the United States by the early part of winter; in the next place, I had passed about time enough, I will not say *lived*, on weak coffee without sugar, and a rather short allowance of beef, anything but good; and I was extremely solicitous to change my diet. To sum up all, "*I had seen the elephant.*"

The whole of August 11th we remained in camp, partly to repair some of the wagons, but principally to rest the oxen, many of their feet having been worn to the quick by the rough and stony roads. In the evening, Howland and his unfortunate friends left for the settlements, and were never seen again save by four of us. On the ensuing morning we made an early start, under the guidance of Carlos, who now was stationed with the advance-guard, as the spy company had been broken up. The day was extremely hot and sultry; yet our guide found a smooth and level prairie, and we were enabled to make some twelve miles in a north-west course before the middle of the afternoon. The advance-guard had by this time arrived at the brow of a small hill, overlooking a cool and shady dell, when a fine buffalo cow was seen lying under a large mesquit-tree, and apparently fast asleep.

One of our party immediately dismounted with the intention of creeping up within gunshot of the animal,

\* Afterward I saw Howland and Baker shot, like dogs, in the plaza at San Miguel. Rosenberry was also killed, although I was not present at his death. My fate would, in all human probability, have been the same had I accompanied them.

while two of us disencumbered our horses of saddlebags and all superfluous articles, handed our rifles to some of the men, with a request that they would take charge of them, and then closely examined our pistols to see that they were in order. My comrade's name was Torry, and we felt determined on giving the buffalo a hard chase should the first hunter not succeed in killing her.

He was successful in creeping within sixty yards of the unconscious animal, but unfortunately his rifle hung fire, throwing the ball wide of the mark. The buffalo rose at the report, and turned her head until her eye caught a glance of us, when she immediately set off in a westerly direction and at a lumbering gallop. Myself and companion were instantly in pursuit at a brisk canter, not intending to push our horses to the utmost until we were close upon our prey. After climbing the acclivity, on the opposite side from where the buffalo was first seen lying, we had a level plain before us, miles in extent, and presenting no other obstacles to a fair race than an occasional patch of small and tangled mesquit bushes. As we were some little distance from the hunter when he fired, the buffalo had a good half mile the start of us; yet before we had been two miles in chase, we were within fifty yards of her. With full confidence that we should soon be alongside, we now spurred our horses to their utmost speed. At almost every stride a deer would start in affright from his covert under the larger mesquit-trees,\* and with a few jumps place himself out of harm's way. Never have I

\* It should be understood that the larger class of these trees, and the only ones which afford a shade on the prairies, never grow close together, but are generally found fifteen or twenty feet apart. At a short distance, a grove of them resembles a peach-orchard.

seen the deer so plentiful as they were during that exciting chase, and so close did we come to them before they started, that we could easily have shot them with our pistols.

We were almost up to the buffalo as we neared a large patch of the smaller mesquits, and had already cocked our pistols, when the affrighted animal dashed directly into the thickest part of the matted thicket. Many of the bushes were dry, yet breaking and crashing through, she rushed madly on, utterly regardless of the long and sharp thorns with which they were covered. Not so with our horses; their chests and shoulders were not shielded by the long, shaggy hair found upon the buffalo, and as the thorns entered their flesh, they shied, bolted, and ran so unkindly that we could hardly spur them through. This gave the cow every advantage, and enabled her to gain some fifty yards while going twice that distance; but on emerging from the thicket the race was our own again. Once more we were nearly up with the flank of the huge and unwieldy animal, and about to discharge our pistols, when another tangled thicket intervened to cut us off. A third and a fourth time we were nearly up with our prey, and considered her in our very hands; but just in the very nick of time another tangled patch would present itself as a shelter and protection to the hunted beast. In this way the race continued some five or six miles, and until our nags gave manifest symptoms of distress. Had the prairie been smooth and clear of thickets, we should have at least discharged every pistol we had, and in all probability brought our noble game to the ground; as it was, with jaded animals and every prospect of farther obstacles ahead, we reined in and gave up the chase—reluctantly enough on my part.

We immediately dismounted from our horses to give them an opportunity of recovering their wind and resting, and in the mean time watched the still retreating animal we had vainly endeavoured to kill. She never appeared to check her heavy, lumbering gallop until lost to view on the distant prairie. The ridge upon which the chase had taken place ran nearly east and west, on the side along which the buffalo led us there appearing to be a slight gradual slope towards the south. In that direction, and running parallel with the ridge, we could see the dim outline of what appeared to be a heavy belt of timber—the bottoms, as we then thought, of a large river. Having noted well the points from which this timber could be seen, we once more mounted our horses, and slowly retraced our steps. The deer, which, as we sped along after the buffalo, had jumped almost from under the very feet of our horses, were now nowhere to be seen—gone with our hopes of a meal of the fat cow, and affording another specimen of the luck of hungry hunters.

We found the command encamped near the spot where we had first seen the buffalo, although there was barely water enough for the men, and our animals stood in the utmost need. We mentioned the circumstance of our having seen a long line of timber to the southward, with every appearance of a large stream in that direction; but Carlos said that such could not be the case, and he spoke with a confidence that gained belief even over the testimony of our senses. He admitted, however, that there might be a creek or small stream, but thought it could not run in a parallel course with the river north of us, the bottoms of which we could see on every day's march. Here, for the time, the matter of a southern watercourse rested.

With the result of our buffalo hunt I was far from satisfied. I had fully made up my mind to have a meal of wild meat that night; and now that visions of the cow, with her delicious marrow-bones, had faded, my mind was led to investigate the chances of obtaining at least a fat buck for our mess. We had seen enough during our hard chase to convince us that they were not only exceedingly numerous, but very tame. The main body of those we had frightened from their noon-day rest, as we galloped along, had gone in the direction of a beautiful valley scarcely a mile from our camp. Confident that I could find some of these feeding in this valley, I shouldered my rifle and hobbled off, as well as my lame ankle would allow me, in that direction.

The sun was just setting as I crossed a little roll which overlooked this retreat. So far from being disappointed in my expectations of finding deer in the quiet dell, I was agreeably surprised on seeing a large drove of them feeding upon the short, sweet grass. They saw me, too, for they lifted their heads on high, gave the well-known whistle, and stared with their mild, large eyes directly towards the spot where I was standing; but instead of leaping hurriedly away, as is their wont when worried and hunted by either whites or Indians, they soon bent their heads to the ground again, and unconcernedly resumed their evening meal.

I could have shot the nearest, from the spot where I first discovered them, and without, to borrow one of the comedian Hackett's expressions, running any great risk of straining my rifle; but they were so exceedingly tame that I thought I would creep directly into their very midst, where I could have my choice of the largest and fattest buck. It seemed hardly necessary, so little did the naturally timid animals regard my approach, to

seek the cover afforded by some scattering mesquit-trees; yet I made use of them, and in five minutes was in a position where I could make my selection from among at least fifty, and the farthest was not seventy yards from me. I soon selected a victim, a noble buck whose plumpness and lightish blue colour betokened an exceeding degree of fatness. Sitting upon the ground, I raised my rifle across my knee as a half rest, took a sight which I thought close and deliberate, and "blazed away." The light blue smoke curled slowly upward in fleecy wreaths upon the still evening air, and as it partially dispersed I saw my deer staring me full in the face, somewhat astonished, perhaps, but far from frightened at the report of my rifle. He hoisted his tail, made five or six bounds, and then stopped to give another inquiring look in the direction where I was sitting. Supposing, of course, that I had given him a mortal wound, I quietly began to reload my rifle with the intention of sacrificing another buck, for not one of the gang had moved ten steps; but what was my astonishment, after having driven well home a bullet and put on a percussion cap, to see the buck I had shot at absolutely nipping the grass with as good a relish as any of the herd. I *knew* that I had hit him—I could not, by any possibility, miss him at so short a distance; but there he stood, a living witness that if I had hit I had at least not hurt him much.

I could easily, from the spot where I was sitting, have selected a victim for my second shot much nearer than was my first love by this time; but having certain misgivings that he *might* not have received a mortal wound, I determined upon paying my respects to him a second time—it was my duty to "put him out of his misery" as quickly as possible. With these intentions

I again rested my rifle across my knee, again pulled the trigger, again the rifle went off with a good, sharp, and as I thought killing crack, and again the deer went off, too, some half a dozen jumps across the prairie. If I thought I had given a mortal wound the first time, I was *sure* of it now—it could not be otherwise—there was no such thing as missing a vital part twice at a distance which was absolutely short enough for putting out a squirrel's eye without spoiling his skin.

But to be ready for another, I again commenced reloading. Once or twice, while handling the powder and lead, I cast a glance at the buck to which I had already dedicated two shots, every moment expecting to see him totter—to see his legs give way—yet there he stood, as firm on his pins as ever, and what was stranger than all, again commenced a supper from which he had been twice interrupted. Still, there was no necessity of wasting more lead upon him—he could not get away—and I therefore commenced a survey of the herd for the next biggest. There was no difficulty in making a choice, for by the time my rifle was ready for a third discharge another large buck had fed along until he was within forty steps of me. I waited until he presented a fair broadside, and then fired. The result was precisely the same as on the first two discharges—the buck I had last shot at jumped off as did the first: his bounds may have been a trifle longer, and there may have been a few more of them. That he was a dead or dying deer there was no question.

Once more I commenced loading my rifle. Some of the deer, in my more immediate vicinity, had, after the three shots, placed a few yards more of ground between us; but others had taken their places, and I was still within half rifle-shot of at least twenty of them. By

the time I had reloaded, and was ready to renew the destruction I had commenced, the dark shades of evening had fallen upon the more distant prairie swells, yet it was still light enough for me to see distinctly every object in my neighbourhood. Deeply did I regret the lateness of the hour, as with a little more light I was sanguine in the belief that I could strew the prairie with trophies of my skill as a hunter. Often, while in the settlements, had I remained patiently at a stand, hour after hour, watching for a pack of hounds to drive some affrighted deer within gunshot, and had even considered myself in some way rewarded if, during a long day's hunt, I had a glimpse of a buck dashing madly through the bushes at a distance of three or four hundred yards, and had heard the exciting bay of the hounds while in hot pursuit. If, by any chance—and such accidents had happened two or three times in my life—I was fortunate enough to bring down a deer, the exploit would furnish me with food for thought and speech for a twelve-month—now, look in what direction I would, the animals were staring me in the face within a stone's throw, and seemed coaxingly to ask me to shoot at them: surely, never before were deer seen so tame.

Anxious to make the most of my time before it was yet too dark, I drew up my rifle a fourth time and discharged it at still another buck. He followed in the footsteps of his shot-at predecessors, evincing astonishment or alarm no otherwise than by bounding off a few jumps and then stopping to gaze at me. Of the two I was probably the most astonished—astonished that he did not fall instantly to the ground.

What was the matter? It might be that my rifle, "sighted" for a distance of one hundred and twenty-five yards, carried too high at forty or fifty. But then, if I

did not shoot them directly through the heart, the ball could not have passed far above it—the animals must be badly, if not mortally wounded.

After having poured a charge of powder into my rifle, I found that I had but a single ball left—for not anticipating such luck, I had started with only five. The confidence I at first felt, that the deer I had shot at must soon fall, was now sensibly diminishing, although lingering hopes were still harboured in my mind that the more tender portions of some one of them, at least, would furnish the raw material for my supper. I had finished loading, and on looking over the little valley I noticed that the deer, with the daylight, had become scarce. There was one buck, however, close by me—not sixty yards distant. Determined to make sure of this one, if the others were really unhurt, I crept up until I verily believe he was not thirty steps from me. The motion of placing my rifle across my knee, for I made each shot sitting upon the ground, attracted the animal's attention so much that he absolutely advanced several steps towards me. He fairly seemed bent upon his own destruction—to meet me half way in my desire to make my last shot certain.

The dimness of night by this time rendered it impossible to "draw a fine bead," in hunter's parlance; but then at a distance at which I could have killed him with a brickbat, what was the necessity of being too particular about my aim? I fired.

The buck did not bound off as the others had done, but, on the contrary, advanced towards me with looks of inquiry! I knew that the severest and most mortal wounds are frequently unattended with pain or a sense of injury—I must have given the buck one of this description. I jumped from the ground and hobbled to-

wards him as fast as my lameness would permit. He turned and scampered off after his comrades. By a fair mathematical calculation the animal went at least twenty yards while I went one; yet I continued the pursuit with the hope that his race would soon be run. Until his broad, white tail was lost in the dim twilight of evening did I press forward, and only gave up the chase when I could see nothing to pursue.

Thus ends a long but veritable account of an adventure with a herd of deer on the Western prairies. To account for their exceeding tameness and approachability, I can offer no other solution than that they had never before met either the white or red man. The narrow space of country which afforded them food was bounded by sterile wastes, and their natural enemies, the red men, had never visited their peaceful dell.

I slowly picked my way back to camp, out of humour and out of conceit with myself, my rifle, my powder, and more especially my bullets. On reaching my comrades, I ascertained that Tom Hancock had shot three noble bucks, and had gone out some time after me. Nothing, he said, save the want of light, had prevented him from killing twenty. I was asked if I had seen any deer. I merely remarked that I had seen several, and here the conversation dropped. I was not disposed to be communicative.

And what, the reader will probably ask, was the reason of my want of success? In all frankness, and with a desire to answer his question fairly, and to the best of my knowledge, belief, and ability, I will here state that there is a very common disease prevalent among young and inexperienced hunters in Texas, which is known as the "*buck ague*." It manifests itself whenever the subject is suddenly brought in close proximity with game of

the larger class, and more difficult to kill, and its effects are to give a hurriedness of action, a tremulousness of the nerves, and an unwonted excitableness to the feelings generally. It strikes me forcibly, and I have little doubt the reader's impressions are closely akin to mine, that I underwent a severe attack of the "*buck ague*" while on the little hunting excursion of which I have just given a description—in plain English, that I was too nervous even to hit a barn door at twenty steps.

## CHAPTER IX.

Brackish Water.—Los Cuervos, or The Crows.—Carlos and his Speculations.—Stream on our Left visited.—Opinion of "Old Paint."—Startling Surmises.—No Water.—Endurance of the Mule.—Singular Valley.—Water seen in the Distance.—Perilous Descent of a Bluff.—Arrival at the River.—More Brackish Water.—An Alarm.—Fire in Camp.—Terrific Spread of the Flames.—Explosion of Cartridges.—Night Ascent of the Bluffs.—Ravages of the Fire.—Extent of our Loss.—Magnificent night Scene.—Our Camp by Daylight.—Coffee too much burned.—Compelled to fall back upon First Principles.—Again on the March.—Intolerable Suffering from Thirst.—A Beautiful Camp.—Disappearance of Carlos and Brignoli.—Horrors of our Situation.—Lost, and without a Guide upon the Prairies.—Shower on the Espy Principle.—Party sent out to Explore.—Rough Travelling.—Gloomy Prospects.—Return to Camp.—Ten Miles for a Draught of Water.—"Doing" our Washing.—Company of Spies sent out.—Death of Doctor Brashear.—Bitter Water.—Rations reduced.—Sufferings now commencing.—Return of one of the Spies.—Again on the March.—Visit to a Commonwealth of Prairie Dogs.—Description of these singular Animals.

THE 13th of August was an eventful day with us—one which few of the party can ever forget. The night previous we encamped without water for our cattle or horses, and the little we obtained for our own use was of the worst quality, and swallowed only to allay the intolerable thirst brought on by a long day's march under the hot sun. The hard buffalo chase had jaded my