

cut down to one pound and a half, and this at a time when the beef had become extremely poor and destitute of nutriment, and more than the former rations was really required to support men worn down and exhausted by long and fatiguing marches, and weakened by the effects of bad water and no water at all. Prudence justified this reduction, however, and the men submitted to it with a cheerfulness that showed they felt the necessity of the course. In the mean time regular hunting parties were detailed for the purpose of adding to our scanty stock of provisions as much as possible; yet, although deer and antelope were far from scarce, nothing like a sufficiency of meat could be procured for our wants. Buffalo were seldom seen, only one being killed during the four days we passed at the camp of the bitter waters.

Much to our joy, a guide returned on the evening of the 20th, and reported that a passage had been found through the mountains. Many of us were unwell and extremely weak from the effect of the strong purgative waters; but the news that we were again to be on the move was of the most welcome kind, and every preparation was made for an early start the next morning.

Learning, from the guide who had returned, that there was a large city or commonwealth of prairie dogs directly on the route the command would take, with two companions I went on to visit these neighbours. We were induced by a double object—first, by a desire to examine one of the republics about which prairie travellers have said so much; and secondly, to obtain something to eat, for the flesh of these animals was said to be excellent.

Our road wound up the sides of a gently-ascending mountain for some six or seven miles. On arriving at

the summit we found a beautiful table-land spread out before us, reaching miles in every direction. The soil appeared to be uncommonly rich, and was covered with a luxurious growth of mesquit-trees. The grass was of the curly mesquit species, the sweetest and most nutritious of all the different kinds of that grass, and it was told me that the dogs seldom establish their towns and cities unless on sites where this grass is found in abundance.

We had proceeded but a short distance, after reaching this beautiful prairie, before we came upon the outskirts of the commonwealth. A few scattering dogs were seen scampering in, their short, sharp yelps giving a general alarm to the whole community.

The first brief cry of danger from the outskirts was soon taken up in the centre of the city, and now nothing was to be heard or seen in any direction but a barking, dashing, and scampering of the mercurial and excitable denizens of the place, each to his burrow. Far as the eye could reach the city extended, and all over it the scene was the same.

We rode leisurely along until we had reached the more thickly-settled portion of the place. Here we halted, and after taking the bridles from our horses to allow them to graze, we prepared for a regular attack upon the inhabitants. The burrows were not more than ten or fifteen yards apart, with well-trodden paths leading in different directions, and I even fancied I could discover something like regularity in the laying out of the streets.

We sat down upon a bank under the shade of a mesquit, and leisurely surveyed the scene before us. Our approach had driven every one to his home in our immediate vicinity, but at the distance of some hundred

yards the small mound of earth in front of each burrow was occupied by a dog, sitting erect on his hinder legs and coolly looking about for the cause of the recent commotion. Every now and then some citizen, more adventurous than his neighbour, would leave his lodgings on a flying visit to a friend, apparently exchange a few words, and then scamper back as fast as his legs would carry him.

By-and-by, as we kept perfectly still, some of our near neighbours were seen cautiously poking their heads from out their holes, and looking craftily, and, at the same time, inquisitively about them. Gradually a citizen would emerge from the entrance of his domicile, come out upon his observatory, perk his head cunningly, and then commence yelping somewhat after the manner of a young puppy—a quick jerk of the tail accompanying each yelp. It is this short bark alone that has given them the name of dogs, as they bear no more resemblance to that animal, either in appearance, action, or manner of living, than they do to the hyena.

We were armed, one with a double-barrelled shot-gun, and another with one of Colt's repeating rifles of small bore, while I had my short, heavy rifle, throwing a large ball, and acknowledged by all to be the best weapon in the command. It would drive a ball completely through a buffalo at the distance of a hundred and fifty yards, and there was no jumping off or running away by a deer when struck in the right place—to use a common expression, "he would never know what had hurt him."* Hit one of the dogs where we would, with a small ball, he would almost invariably turn a peculiar somerset, and get into his hole—but by a ball from my

* I trust the reader has forgotten my adventure with the large drove of deer, as related in the previous chapter.

rifle, the entire head of the animal would be knocked off, and after this there was no escape. With the shot-gun, again, we could do nothing but waste ammunition. I fired it at one dog not ten steps off, having in a good charge of buckshot, and thought I must cut him into fragments—I wounded him severely, but with perhaps three or four shot through him he was still able to wriggle and tumble into his hole.

For three hours we remained in this commonwealth, watching the movements of the inhabitants, and occasionally picking off one of the more unwary. No less than nine were got by the party, and one circumstance I would mention as singular in the extreme, and showing the social relationship which exists among these animals, as well as the kind regard they have one for another. One of them had perched himself upon the pile of earth in front of his pole, sitting up and exposing a fair mark, while a companion's head was seen poking out of the entrance, too timid, perhaps, to trust himself farther. A well-directed ball from my rifle carried away the entire top of the former's head, and knocked him some two or three feet from his post perfectly dead. While reloading, the other boldly came out, seized his companion by one of his legs, and before we could reach the hole had drawn him completely out of sight. There was a touch of feeling in the little incident—a something human, which raised the animals in my estimation, and ever after I did not attempt to kill one of them, except when driven by extreme hunger.

The prairie dog is about the size of the common wild rabbit of the United States, heavier, perhaps, more compact, and with much shorter legs. In appearance it closely resembles the woodchuck, or groundhog, of the Northern and Middle States, although not more than

two thirds as large. The colour is the same, being a dark, reddish brown, while the formation of the head and teeth is the same as in all the different species of squirrels, to which family it belongs. In their habits they are clannish, social, and extremely convivial, never living alone like other animals, but, on the contrary, always found in villages or large settlements. They are a wild, frolicsome, madcap set of fellows when undisturbed, uneasy and ever on the move, and appear to take especial delight in chattering away the time, and visiting from hole to hole to gossip and talk over each other's affairs—at least so their actions would indicate. When they find a good location for a village, and there is no water in the immediate vicinity, old hunters say, they dig a well to supply the wants of the community. On several occasions I crept close to their villages, without being observed, to watch their movements. Directly in the centre of one of them I particularly noticed a very large dog, sitting in front of the door or entrance to his burrow, and by his own actions and those of his neighbours it really seemed as though he was the president, mayor, or chief—at all events, he was the "big dog" of the place. For at least an hour I secretly watched the operations in this community. During that time the large dog I have mentioned received at least a dozen visits from his fellow-dogs, which would stop and chat with him a few moments, and then run off to their domicils. All this while he never left his post for a moment, and I thought I could discover a gravity in his deportment not discernible in those by which he was surrounded. Far is it from me to say that the visits he received were upon business, or had anything to do with the local government of the village; but it certainly ap-

peared so. If any animal has a system of laws regulating the body politic, it is certainly the prairie dog.

If a person is fortunate enough to gain the immediate vicinity of one of their villages unobserved—a very difficult matter, for their sentinels are always on the alert—he will discover the inhabitants gambolling, frisking, and running about the well-trodden paths, occasionally stopping a moment as if to exchange a word with a neighbour, and then hurrying back to their own lodges. Should he chance to discover some quiet citizen, sitting gravely at his doorway, he has but to watch him for a short time ere he will notice some eccentricity of conduct. His manner of entering his hole will remind the spectator of the antics of Pantaloon in a pantomime; for, instead of walking quietly in, he does it with an eccentric bound and half somerset, his hind feet knocking together as he pitches headlong into the darkness below; and before the aforesaid spectator has yet fairly recovered from the half laugh caused by the drollery of the movement, he will see the dog slowly thrust his head from his burrow, and with a pert and impudent expression of countenance peer cunningly about, as if to ascertain the effect his recent antic had caused.

A singular species of owl is invariably found residing in and about the dog-towns. It has a longer body and smaller head than the common owl of the settlements, yet possesses all the gravity of deportment and solemnity of mien which distinguish the genus.

One would suppose that a constant intercourse with neighbours of such comic temperaments as the dogs possess would destroy his austerity of demeanour; yet the owl of the dog-village sits upon the earthen mound in front of the hole, and surveys the eccentricities of his friends without a change of countenance. He joins

them not in any of their sports, yet still seems to be on the best of terms; and as he is frequently seen entering and emerging from the same hole, this singular bird may be looked upon as a member of the same family, or at least a retainer whose services are in some way necessary to the comfort and well-being of the animal whose hospitality he shares.

Rattlesnakes, too, and of immense size, dwell in the same lodges with the dogs; but the idea that has been entertained of their living upon sociable terms of companionship is utterly without foundation. The snakes I look upon as loafers, not easily shaken off by the regular inhabitants, and they make use of the dwellings of the dogs as more comfortable quarters than they can find elsewhere. We killed one a short distance from a burrow, which had made a meal of a half-grown dog; and although I do not think they can master the larger animals, the latter are still compelled to let them pass in and out without molestation—a nuisance, like many in more elevated society, that cannot be got rid of.

The first town we visited was much the largest seen on the entire route, being some two or three miles in length by nearly a mile in width at the widest part. In the vicinity were smaller villages—suburbs of the larger town, to all appearance. After spending some three hours in the very heart of the settlements, and until not an inhabitant could be seen in any direction, we resaddled our horses and set off in search of the command. Thus ended my first visit to one of the numerous prairie-dog commonwealths of the Far West.

CHAPTER X.

A Meal of Prairie Dogs.—Arrival at another brackish Water Camp.—Shower at Night, with fresh Water in the Morning.—Return of the Spy Company.—A regular "Northeaster."—Report of the Spies.—Disagreeable Bivouac.—Indians in Camp.—Horses stolen.—A bad Bargain.—Daring of the Indians.—Fine Weather again.—Once more on the Road.—Dog Towns.—Meeting with a Party of Indians.—Horse Meat far from being bad Eating.—Wolves about.—A dreary Desert.—Delicious fresh-water Stream.—Latitude and Longitude again taken.—Pleasant Prospects.—Again encompassed with Difficulties.—A Passage out found.—Steppes.—Mesquit Prairie and Prairie Dogs.—Mountains in the Distance.—Singing Birds, and Thoughts of Home.—Delusive Hopes.—More Horses stolen.—Bed of Large River crossed.—Arrival at the Quintufue.—Large Indian Camp discovered.—Cayguas on all Sides.—Indian Provisions.—A Party sent out.—Farther Advance impossible.—A Night without Water.—Preparations for taking a back Track.—Exciting News.—Firing of Guns heard.—Lieutenant Hull and four Men killed by Cayguas.—A Chase after Indians.—Return to the Quintufue.—Determination to divide the Command.—Description of the Cayguas.

WE had scarcely travelled three miles, after leaving the large dog-town, before we descried the white tops of our wagons at some distance in our rear. Finding a dry mesquit, we broke off some of the larger branches, kindled a fire, and cooked for each man a dog. The meat we found exceedingly sweet, tender, and juicy—resembling that of the squirrel, only that it was much fatter. Our meal over, we next wasted three or four hours in vainly endeavouring to shoot a deer or antelope. Numbers of them were seen; but the hunting parties had scoured their range, killed several of them, and rendered the animals unusually shy. Late in the afternoon we sought the trail of our wagons, and on finding it set off at a pace which brought us up with