

too, in the ocean wave, not to be found in the unchangeable face of these great Western wastes, and nowhere else does one feel that sickly sensation of loneliness with which he is impressed when nothing but a boundless prairie is around him. There he feels as if *in* the world, but not *of* it—there he finds no sign or trace to tell him that there is something beyond, that millions of human beings are living and moving upon the very earth on which he stands. Shakspeare was in the woods when he found

“—tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

Had he been on the immense prairie I am now speaking about he would have found no such companionship.

We rode briskly forward until near sundown, and then encamped by the side of a small water-hole—the basin formed by a hollow in the prairie. Although we were only two days out, the rations of many of the men were nearly gone by this time, so much of the meat had been spoiled from having been improperly cured. Not a buffalo could be seen on the prairie, nor was any fresh “sign” visible. The mustangs, too, had left this part of the plain, as also the deer and antelope, driven off, doubtless, by the scarcity of water. Had it not been for the showers which fell while travelling this dreary waste, we should all most certainly have perished; for even the immense cañons had no other water in them than that which had fallen after we left the Quintufue.

Scarcely had we rolled ourselves up in our blankets before we were again visited by a heavy shower; but this time we had chosen higher ground, and though

thoroughly drenched, we were not washed from our fastenings, as on the night before.

The morning of September 3d broke bright and cloudless, the sun rising from out the prairie in all his majesty. Singular as it may appear, nearly every shower, from the time we left Austin until we reached the settlements of New Mexico, fell during the night, generally commencing shortly after sundown. Again we were compelled to lose some two hours in spreading and drying our clothes and blankets, after which we saddled our animals and pursued our weary journey. Our course, as I have already observed, was northwest, and we were now enabled to keep it without difficulty.

We had scarcely proceeded six miles, after drying our blankets, when we suddenly came upon another immense rent or chasm in the earth, exceeding in depth the one we had so much difficulty in crossing the day before. No one was aware of its existence until we were immediately upon its brink, when a spectacle, exceeding in grandeur anything we had previously beheld, came suddenly in view. Not a tree or bush, no outline whatever, marked its position or course, and we were all lost in amazement as one by one we left the double-file ranks and rode up to the verge of the yawning abyss.

In depth it could not be less than eight hundred or a thousand feet, was from three to five hundred yards in width, and at the point where we first struck it the sides were nearly perpendicular. A sickly sensation of dizziness was felt by all as we looked down, as it were, into the very depths of the earth. In the dark and narrow valley below, an occasional spot of green relieved the eye, and a small stream of water, now ri-

sing to the view, then sinking beneath some huge rock, was bubbling and foaming along. Immense walls, columns, and in some places what appeared to be arches, were seen standing, modelled by the wear of the water, undoubtedly, yet so perfect in form that we could with difficulty be brought to believe that the hand of man had not fashioned them. The rains of centuries, falling upon an immense prairie, had here found a reservoir, and their workings upon the different veins of earth and stone had formed these strange and fanciful shapes.

Before reaching the chasm we had crossed numerous large trails, leading a little more to the west than we were travelling; and the experience of the previous day led us to suppose that they all terminated at a common crossing near by. In this conjecture we were not disappointed, for a trot of half an hour brought us into a large road, the thoroughfare along which millions of Indians, buffalo, and mustangs had evidently travelled for years. Perilous as the descent appeared, we well knew there was no other near. The leading mule was again urged forward, the steadier and older horses were next driven over the sides, and the more skittish and untractable brought up the rear. Once in the narrow path, which led circuitously down the descent, there was no turning back, and our half-maddened animals finally reached the bottom in safety. Several large stones were loosened from their fastenings by our men, during the frightful descent; these would leap, dash, and thunder down the precipitous sides, and strike against the bottom far below us with a terrific and reverberating crash.

We found a running stream on reaching the lower level of the chasm, on the opposite side of which was a

romantic dell covered with short grass, and a few scattering cotton-woods. A large body of Indians had encamped on this very spot but a few days previous, the wilted limbs of the trees and other "sign" showing that they had made it a resting-place. We, too, halted a couple of hours, to give our horses an opportunity to graze and rest themselves. The trail which led up on the opposite side was discovered a short distance above us, to the south, winding up the steep and ragged sides of the acclivity.

As we journeyed along this dell all were again struck with admiration at the strange and fanciful figures made by the washing of the waters during the rainy season. In some places perfect walls, formed of reddish clay, were seen standing, and were they anywhere else it would be impossible to believe that other than the hand of man had formed them. The veins of which these walls were composed were of even thickness, very hard, and ran perpendicularly; and when the softer sand which had surrounded them was washed away, the veins still remained standing upright, in some places a hundred feet high, and three or four hundred in length. Columns, too, were there, and such was their appearance of architectural order, and so much of chaste grandeur was there about them, that we were lost in wonder and admiration. Sometimes the breastworks, as of forts, would be plainly visible; then, again, the frowning turrets of some castle of the olden time. Cumbersome pillars of some mighty pile, such as is dedicated to religion or royalty, were scattered about; regularity was strangely mingled with disorder and ruin, and nature had done it all. Niagara has been considered one of her wildest freaks, but Niagara sinks into insignificance when compared with the wild grandeur

of this awful chasm—this deep, abyssmal solitude, as Carlyle would call it. Imagination carried us back to Thebes, to Palmyra, and to ancient Athens, and we could not help thinking that we were now among their ruins.

Our passage out of this place was effected with the greatest difficulty. We were obliged to carry our rifles, holsters, and saddlebags in our hands, and in clambering up a steep pitch, one of the horses, striking his shoulder against a projecting rock, was precipitated some fifteen or twenty feet directly upon his back. All thought he must be killed by the fall; but strangely enough, he rose immediately, shook himself, and a second effort in climbing proved more successful—the animal had not received the slightest apparent injury!

By the middle of the afternoon we were all safely across, after passing five or six hours completely shut out from the world. Again we found ourselves upon the level prairie, and on looking back, after proceeding some hundred yards, not a sign of the immense chasm was visible. The plain we were then upon was at least one hundred and fifty miles in width, and the two chasms I have mentioned were the reservoirs of the heavy body of rain which falls during the wet season, and at the same time its conductors to the running streams. The prairie is undoubtedly the largest in the world, and the cañons are in perfect keeping with the size of the prairie. Whether the waters which run into them sink into the earth, or find their way to the Canadian, is a matter of uncertainty—but I am inclined to believe the latter to be the fact.

At sundown we halted by the side of a water-hole, and encamped for the night. Many of the men were now entirely out of provisions, while those who still had

a little beef left had saved it by stinting themselves on the previous days. The worst of our sufferings had commenced.

At an early hour on the ensuing morning our march was continued, the cravings of hunger by this time being sensibly felt by all. Small droves of deer and antelope were seen during the day, brought from the water-courses doubtless by the recent rains, and towards night a drove of mustangs was descried upon a roll of the prairie half a mile ahead of us. They were all extremely shy, however, and although many rifles were discharged, not a shot was successful—we could not get near enough to kill one of them. Flocks of small birds, about the size of and in many respects resembling the blackbird, travelled with us much of this day's march, hovering along in front and rear of the line, and so exceedingly tame that they would light on our hats and arms, and on the necks and heads of our horses, without manifesting the least sign of fear. One or two of these singular birds were caught and killed, and found to be fat and of good flavour. That night we encamped near a water-hole, covering an area of some twenty acres, but very shallow. Flocks of large curlews, one of the finest birds that fly, were hovering and lighting about on all sides. Had I been in possession of a double-barrelled gun with small shot I would have had at least one good meal; but I had only a heavy rifle, and went to my lodgings on the ground supperless.

About two o'clock the next morning we saddled our horses and resumed the march, journeying still in a northwest course by the stars. On leaving the main camp on the Quintufue it was thought by all that we could not be more than a hundred miles from San Miguel—we had now more than made that distance, and

were still upon the immense prairie. To relieve ourselves from the horrible suspense we were in, to get *somewhere*, in short, was our eager aim, and hurriedly we pressed onward, in the hope of finding relief. Our horses, in the mean time, had comparatively suffered less than ourselves, for the grazing on the prairie had been good; but the hurried marches and the difficult crossings of the immense chasms now began to tell upon them.

At sunrise we halted near a small pond of water to rest the animals and allow them an hour to feed. Large white cranes were standing about in the pond, and flocks of ducks were swimming upon the surface. While we were lounging on the ground, a large antelope was seen slowly approaching us—now stopping, then walking a few steps nearer—evidently inquisitive as to who, or rather what we were. His curiosity finally cost him his life; for although Captain Sutton the evening before had given orders that not another shot should be fired without his consent, one of our men could not resist the temptation of bringing the antelope down. The man was arrested and sent to the rear for this disobedience of orders, but I have little doubt the excellent meal he made more than compensated for the disgrace. The order of Captain S. that no rifle should be discharged, was an excellent one, as many shots had been wasted on the previous day; but the best officer in existence cannot restrain a half-starved man when he sees a hearty meal directly within his grasp. A number of antelopes were seen in the neighbourhood of the water-hole, but no farther attempt was made to shoot them.

Shortly after this incident of killing the antelope we again resumed our journey. The same dreary specta-

cle, a boundless prairie, was before us—not a sign was observable that we were nearing its edge. We journeyed rapidly on until near the middle of the afternoon, when a dark spot was noticed some mile or mile and a half directly in advance. At first it was thought to be a low bush, but as we gradually approached it had more the appearance of a rock, although nothing of the kind had been seen from the time of our first coming upon the prairie, except at the chasms.

“A buffalo!” cried one of the men, whose keen eye had penetrated the mystery: “a buffalo, lying down and asleep!”

A spyglass in our possession proved the man’s assertion. Here, then, was a chance for at least as much as we could all eat, and the temptation was too strong to be resisted. The Leather Stocking of the party, Tom Hancock, was deputed to go forward on foot with a rifle, in the hope that he might at least get near enough to wound the animal, while myself and three of my companions, who were better mounted than the rest, made every preparation for a chase to the death.

Disencumbering our animals of every pound of superfluous weight, we tied handkerchiefs over our heads and prepared for a sport rendered doubly exciting by our starving condition. Each of my comrades had a pair of heavy belt pistols, and in addition one of Colt’s revolving pistols, with a cylinder containing five shots. In my holsters I had a heavy Harper’s Ferry dragoon-pistol, throwing a large ball with great force and accuracy, besides a bell-muzzled affair which was loaded with two or three balls and some twenty-five or thirty buckshot. With this I intended at least to give the buffalo a broadside which would bleed him freely. To complete my armament, I also had one of Colt’s pistols,

which I had borrowed from one of the officers for the occasion.

Beyond where the animal was quietly lying, in a western direction, the prairie rose very gradually for a mile—farther than that we knew nothing of the nature of the ground. Tom Hancock could creep closer to the smooth prairie and make less show than any man in the command—knew all the advantages of taking the wind, and was conversant with every species of strategy by which to make his game certain—but he still thought it more prudent to give the animal a shot when within a hundred and fifty yards than to run the risk of crawling nearer. He had desired us not to move unless the buffalo started, hoping to have another shot; we therefore sat quietly upon our horses to watch the effect of his first discharge.

The buffalo, evidently struck though but slightly wounded, bounded from the ground, stretched himself as does the tame bull on first rising, whisked his tufted tail right and left, looked slowly and inquiringly about him, and then lay down again upon the ground. We did not stir, and Hancock quietly reloaded his rifle without rising from the prairie. Another shot now followed, and this time the huge animal again bounded up and lashed his tail; but no sooner had he turned his head in our direction, and discovered his enemies, than he wheeled and started off towards the west at the usual heavy, lumbering gallop. He had evidently been hit by the second shot as well as the first, and this time the wound was probably more severe.

At an easy canter our little party now dashed off in pursuit, not putting our horses to their speed at first from fear of blowing them too early in a chase which we determined should last to the death. We kept on

in company until we had neared the top of the first prairie roll; here, finding my horse in much the best condition, I left my companions, and at an increased speed continued the pursuit. I have said that the prairie was smooth; by this the reader, who has never seen one of those immense grassy plains, must not imagine an even, hard, and well-trod common, resembling the spot, mayhap, where in boyhood he has kicked football or joined in the many sports incidental to his earlier years; on the contrary, the smoothest of our Western prairies have an uneven surface, and are filled with the holes of the mole and the field-mouse. Through the slight thickness of earth which covers these holes the feet of the horse frequently sink; and unless he has been brought up and trained on the prairies, he can never be taught to run upon them with that confidence which develops his full powers. When pursued, the buffalo chooses the roughest road he can find, and leads his pursuers down break-neck precipices, or up rough and broken steeps, inaccessible to other feet than his. Clumsy as he really is, his headlong obstinacy frequently carries him through difficulties at which even the more active and well-trained steed recoils with terror, and which the latter might overcome with greater ease did he but dare attempt them. But to the chase.

On reaching the summit of the prairie roll, some little distance in advance of my companions, I discovered the buffalo still galloping heavily and clumsily along, about five hundred yards before me. The descent of the prairie was here so gradual that I could see every object at least five miles distant, and the surface was much smoother than I had anticipated. I now put spurs to my horse, and dashed boldly down the gentle slope. Giving one look behind, I saw that one

of my companions at the starting-place, Major Howard, had given up the chase, or rather his horse had given up. Lieutenant Lubbock and one of the men, the latter mounted on a mule which, if he could not get over the ground particularly fast, had at least the commendable quality of running all day, were still in hot pursuit.

The prairie, as I have said, was comparatively smooth; and although I could not spur my horse into his full, free, and open stride, I was soon up with the huge animal, which was now at his utmost speed. Occasionally, as if to rest his legs on one side, he would roll over on the other, changing from side to side as his weight would tire him. This roll of the body must have been noticed by all who have chased these animals, and is a peculiar gait which I believe belongs to the buffalo alone. The one I was chasing was a bull of the largest and most powerful frame, his bright, glaring eyeballs peering out from his shaggy frontlet of hair, showing plainly that he was maddened by his wounds and the close pursuit. It was with the greatest difficulty, so terrible was his aspect, that I could get my horse within twenty yards of him, and when I fired my first charge at that distance the ball did not take effect.

As the chase continued my horse came to his work more kindly, and soon appeared to take an interest in the exciting race; yet I was still unable to lay him up directly alongside the buffalo. I could approach him closely in the rear, but the affrighted steed sheered as soon as he lapped the mountain of scraggy hair and flesh. Finding it impossible to gain the position I so much wished, I dropped a few yards behind; then, by dashing my spurs furiously in his sides, I was enabled

to bring my horse to charge upon the buffalo's quarters. As I neared the animal I raised my pistol, and when about passing him, in a diagonal line, fired at less than four yards' distance. The now infuriated buffalo shrank as the ball took effect just back of the long hair on his shoulders. Under such headway was I when I discharged my pistol that I was compelled to cut across directly in front of him and close to his head, and when safely on the opposite or right side I reined up and once more dropped behind for another charge. Again I put spurs to their work, and, as I fairly flew by, gave the buffalo another wound directly in his side. He was now foaming with rage and pain. His eyes resembled two deep-red balls of fire—his tongue was out, and curling inwardly—while his long and tufted tail was either carried high aloft or lashed madly against his sides—a wild, and, at the same time, magnificent picture of desperation.

By this time my horse was almost completely subject to my guidance. He no longer pricked his ears with fear or sheered off as I approached the monster we were pursuing, but ran directly up so that I could almost touch the animal with my pistol. I had still two shots left in the repeater, and after discharging them I intended to fall back upon the old Harper's Ferry, and, by a well-directed shot, make a finish of the business.

After firing my third shot I again crossed the path of the buffalo, and so near that my right foot nearly touched his horns. The wound I had given caused him to spring suddenly forward, thus bringing me in too close a contact to be either pleasing or prudent. On coming up with him a fourth time, and so near that the muzzle of my pistol was not two yards from his side, the barrel dropped off just as I was about to pull the

trigger. As I dashed by the infuriated animal he vainly endeavoured to gore and overthrow my horse by suddenly turning his head and springing at me.

The chase was now up, so far as I was concerned, for the pistol was a borrowed one, and very valuable. I had checked my horse and dismounted to search for it, when Lieutenant Lubbock came up. His horse was completely broken down and unable to reach the buffalo—in the hurry and excitement I told him to mount mine immediately and continue the pursuit. Soon he was up with the buffalo. By this time, so kindly had the horse taken to his work, that his rider was able to fire every shot without once passing the wounded animal. The latter stuck the horse once with his left horn, but did not hurt him seriously.

The other pursuer with the mule still continued the chase, and as the pace of the buffalo slackened from loss of blood and weariness, the former gradually crept up. I stopped to gaze upon the exciting scene. Every minute or two a flash and smoke would be seen, and then the sharp report of the pistol would reach the spot where I stood.

In this way the chase was continued until Lieutenant L. had discharged his own arms, together with my holster pistols. He then pulled up, and the other pursuer mounted my horse and continued the chase. I could not help pitying the noble animal, which had by this time run at least six miles. In a very short time the new pursuer was up with the buffalo, and again I could see the smoke as each pistol was discharged; but by this time the space between us was too great for me to hear the reports. I gazed until both the pursued and pursuer were mere black specks upon the prairie, and never turned my eyes until they were completely lost in the distance.

## CHAPTER XII.

A successful Search.—The Buffalo brought to Bay.—Appearance of my Horse after the Chase.—Prospects of another Shower.—Adventure with a Rattlesnake in the Dark.—Fortunate Escape.—The Shower upon us.—Buffalo found in the Morning.—March resumed.—Swimming our Animals.—Singular Method of Cooking.—Wolves in our Vicinity.—Encounter with a Drove of Mustangs.—Excitement among us.—Mountains discovered ahead.—Leave the grand Prairie.—Singular Hills.—Compelled to abandon our Course.—Chances becoming Desperate.—Suffering and Starvation.—Large fresh-water Stream discovered.—Speculations as to its Name.—Mexican "Sign" seen.—More Remarks in relation to Red River.—Plum Patches.—Carlos and Brignoli seen.—Their Sufferings.—The Texans driven to the greatest strait for Food.—An Anecdote.—Compelled to eat broken-down Horse Flesh.—A cold, raw Night.—Fairly among the Rocky Mountains.—A beautiful Valley.—A Feast of Catfish.—Arrival at the Angosturas.—Encounter with a Party of Mexicans.—Unwonted Excitement.—Matias sent back to the Command.—Advance towards the Settlements.—Farther Sufferings of the Texans.—Meet with an immense Herd of Sheep.—A Feast.—Dissertation on Starvation.—Mexican Shepherds and their Dogs.

A SEARCH of brief duration enabled me to find the lost barrel of my pistol; and when this was accomplished I went back alone to seek the main body. After traveling a short distance, I met several of our men, who had previously been concealed by a slight roll of the prairie, and were now coming out, eager to learn our success. The last man who had taken up the pursuit of the buffalo with my horse was soon seen cantering back. Half an hour brought him up, when he informed us that after firing all his pistols he had brought the buffalo to bay, and that he had left him with the blood running from his mouth—a sure sign that he had received his death wound. I gave him Lieutenant Lubbock's horse, and with a small party he went back in search of the wounded buffalo.