



## THE PRONG-HORNED ANTELOPE.

PARTY of my friends were starting down the Platte river to see their herds of cattle.

"Don't you want to go along with us?" said Calvin. "We may get some antelope."

The idea of riding and camping, and story-telling and hunting for a week seemed charming just then; so, with blankets and rifle, I joined the party.

In an hour we came in sight of the river, of which some traveller has said, "It is navigable only for a shingle," so sandy is its bed and so changing its currents. All day we followed the river bottom, now near the water, now a mile away from it. In the "ox-bows," or bends of the river, the grass was growing abundantly, and thousands and tens of thousands of sleek kine were feeding there.

Near the highlands we saw great numbers of prairie dogs and little owls, living in the same holes. The dogs wagged their tails, and, barking with great energy, ran into their houses; the owls, old and young, toddled in too when we approached.

Toward evening we saw tall blue cranes alighting on the sand-bars. Flocks of ducks arose from the water and fled from the hawks. Jack-rabbits bounded queerly from our path, and, a little way off, turned to see what we intended to do. We saw two wolves sneaking among the bluffs, but never an antelope.

The morning after we reached Dana's cattle-camp; we went out early among the sand-hills for antelopes. Just after daybreak they are busy feeding, and then may be more easily approached than at other times of the day.

"Look yonder!" said Calvin. "See what a mat of prickly pear!"

"What of it?" said I. "I have seen many such."

"Nothing of it," said he; "only I was going to say that when a wolf tries to catch a young antelope, the old one takes her young into the middle of one of these great prickly-pear beds. You see, the thorns don't hurt the antelopes' hoofs at all; but Mr. Wolf can't set his paw on them, any way he can fix it, so the young antelope stands between the mother's feet till the wolf leaves."

Some three miles from the river we came to the haunts of the game. We became silent, and peeped carefully over each ridge to see if any antelopes were to be seen. Soon we separated, with the understanding that if a group of antelopes were found, a signal should be given for the party to come. In half an hour, Dana was seen to wave his hand, and we rejoined him at once. He told us that in the next hollow four antelopes were feeding.

Noiselessly we crept to the little eminence before us, keeping our eyes wide open for thorns and rattlesnakes. Within sixty yards stood two old antelopes and two beautiful and graceful little ones, that did not seem larger than cats, only their legs were much longer. The old ones were about three feet high, with bodies about the size of those of sheep. They made a very pretty tableau, but quickly turned and bounded away, the little ones ahead, making no more noise than a cloud passing through the sky. Had not Dana been so polite, one of them might have been secured. But I was glad, after all, that we did not make a break in the happy family.

We now agreed to hunt independently. During the next half hour we

saw plenty of game in the distance. After a time, Dana and I met. Carelessly ascending a little sand-hill, we started up a lonely buck. We so quickly sank upon the ground that the animal had only a glimpse of us, and after a sharp run, turned to satisfy its ever-eager curiosity as to what we were. My companion passed his red handkerchief to me.

"Wave that," he whispered, "on the end of your rifle. We'll try the Indian game on him. Easy! Wave it easy."

Slowly I waved the flag to and fro, just in the creature's sight, while Dana settled his body at full length upon the sand, and rested his Winchester rifle on an unoccupied ant-hill.

The antelope now advanced a few steps, retreated, turned and looked again. As we presented the same appearance, he became as curious concerning us as Blue Beard's wife about the forbidden room. Several times we thought he had seen enough of us, and was off. But no; his intense curiosity forced him nearer and nearer. Unused to hunting as I was, I became much excited. Had that antelope been an elephant, I don't believe I could have hit it. I had what old hunters call "buck fever." Suddenly the buck exposed his side to us. Crack! went Dana's rifle, and over went the antelope.

We saw a herder on his pony, not far away, and beckoned him to come near.

Dana knew him, and asked him to pack our game to camp. But no sooner had we placed it behind the saddle, than the pony reared and plunged until he had dislodged his burden. So we cut off the haunches, and making pack-horses of ourselves, took them to camp.

In the month of June it is not a hard matter to capture young antelopes. They are then so frail and tender that a man on horseback soon overtakes them. They are then taught to take milk from a bottle, and soon become very tame. We saw several so tame that they would come at call. We passed a turf cabin where there were five of these pretty pets, all with ribbons about the neck, and one, a graceful doe, with a cherry-coloured ribbon tied about the tail. The Indian woman who owned them, probably fearing our dog, opened the door and called them, when they very sedately filed into the cabin.

The winter before last (1879) was a terrible season for the poor antelopes. The snow lay upon the ground for several months. Thousands of cattle perished. The antelopes congregated in great flocks within a few miles of town. From an eminence, five thousand could be seen at once. There were millions of little holes in the snow where they had put their noses down to get the grass.

At last the poor creatures took refuge in the Rocky Mountains, where food and shelter were more abundant.

