



BY DAVID WAKEMAN FENTON, JR.

“WHO ever heard of hunting without a gun?” asked the tenderfoot.

“We’ll show you,” answered the sporting doctor. “A good pack of hounds and some fast saddle ponies are all you need out on these plains.”

At a little station on the Colorado prairie, one cold March night, seven eager coyote hunters stepped off the train from Denver with a pack of hounds. The surrounding country was infested with coyotes, often called prairie wolves—those lamb-stealers of the Western wastes. All the party were eager for some coursing, as well as to do the ranchmen a good turn by riding the country of a few of these pests. Sitting around the big ranch stove of the party’s host, each one was anxious to tell the Eastern friend of the habits, the history and the legends of the coyote, which possessed the cunning of a fox, the look of a wolf, and a hound’s doggedness.

The young fellow from the East had hunted a bit to hounds, but he had never followed sight-running hounds. He had come West for experience. These hunters were going to give him a liberal allowance at the start. The conversation brought out some good points.

“What does a coyote look like?” came the unsophisticated question.

The lawyer of the crowd offered the technical answer: “The coyote has the muzzle of a fox, with a wolf’s tail and feet. He is two-thirds the size of that big gray fellow called the timber wolf, which haunts the forests. The coyote’s dingy white and tawny-brown coat takes the color of the brown adobe dust that fills his shaggy hair. A straight bushy

tail tells you which way he is going. At the slightest alarm, his slanting ears stand erect as a clipped bull-terrier’s. His long, lean body is mounted on short, sinewy legs, which handicap him as a swift runner. But he makes up for this deficiency in cunning, as his long, pointed, foxy nose clearly shows.”

“I hear he is a consort of rattlesnake and vulture, and lives in a hole in the ground. How about that?” queried the Easterner.

“The word is pronounced ki’-o-te,” came the information from the etymologist of the party. “The root *coy* means *hole* in the Nahuatl language. The coyote prowls around most of his time, trying to satisfy a craving hunger, but when hard pressed he will ‘hole up’ and it’s possible a rattler may be there to greet him. As to the carrion-eating vulture, the coyote takes to that habit only from direst necessity. He prefers farmers’ pullets, young turkeys, lambs, jack-rabbits, or even a saddle of antelope.”

“You can’t make me believe that a coyote—an animal no larger than a col-lie dog—can run down and kill an antelope!” protested the tenderfoot.

“Well, they can do it,” was the prompt answer of Billy Parks, hero of many a prairie hunt. “I have seen them. Out in this country it’s called ‘ham-stringing.’ The coyote relies on numbers and tactics; all his cunning, impudence and audacity are brought into play.”

“Did you ever actually see such a capture?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Billy in a tone of superior authority. “We were out hunting pronghorns one morning late in the fall. Ascending a rising knoll of the prairie, our ponies stood up their

ears and we sighted a band of antelope grazing below. Just then a crawling coyote came prowling over the opposite knoll. Singling out a small buck, feeding apart from the band, the crafty wolf gave chase, carefully turning the buck toward his partner, which was squatting behind a sage bush. The antelope was gaining rapidly, when up jumped the crouching coyote and took up the run. The sly fellow did not pursue, but made a cross-cut, turning the tired buck toward another colleague, and, will you believe it, behind a rise of ground lay a third coyote, which began a fresh relay. By this time the pronghorn was so exhausted that the coyote managed to catch up and plant his fangs around the buck's left hind tendon. Tenaciously he hung on until he severed the cord and the antelope was limping on three legs with little speed. The two accomplices came up and helped tear the buck to pieces—one at his throat, the other on his hams.

"Then ensued a savage fight among the coyotes for the meat, still bleeding and warm. They were maddened by hunger. It was a vivid picture of hamstringing, which they also practice on cows and young calves."

"That's true, all of it," spoke up the ranchman. "I have seen them hunt in packs of four or six, and occasionally as many as a dozen. When three or four of them are hunting jack-rabbits, the coyote in at the death greedily devours all the carcass himself, and without compunction lets his partners go hungry."

"I should think you would use poison, traps, or anything to get rid of such a pest," ventured the Eastern man.

"It is not so easy," continued this herder of cattle. "The coyote usually keeps away from all figure 4, steel, box or log traps. He's got too good a nose to tamper with them. Some times we get him by a 'drag.' We take a loin of beef, inject it with poison, and drag it along in a round-about route, leaving it some distance from the ranch house. Occasionally a dead coyote with a swollen belly lies near by the next morning."

"Don't you save the hides?"

"No; they're not good for much," lamented the ranchman.

"There is a bounty on the coyote's head," broke in the lawyer, "but the State's got no money to pay it, so what's the use skinning him?"

The next morning dawned as only it can in Colorado. The light covering of snow was evaporating under rays of clearest sunshine. The dry, tingling air invigorated and tightened every muscle; every breath seemed to reach to one's lowest depths. It was a perfect morning for coursing coyotes.

After breakfast the party mounted the string of dancing broncos. On the light spring wagon was a rack filled with the hounds; keen, lithe, smooth-coated greyhounds, fierce long-haired borzoi and shaggy stag-hounds, all packed in together.

"Why don't you let them run and limber up and try to catch a scent?" asked the tenderfoot, who was absorbing a vast amount of coyote knowledge with each question.

"Oh, they'll get enough limbering before the day is over," answered Billy Parks; "we let them ride to save them. As for scent, they haven't any. They have lots of long nose, but can't smell much. These hounds run entirely by sight."

The party were ascending one of those long rolls of ground which swell over the prairie in earthen waves, when the wagon in the van topped a knoll. There was terrific commotion among the tangled hounds. Down the valley scramble in all directions a band of seven coyotes. The dogs are let out and begin the chase



AN EAGER COUPLE.

in two packs, running in opposite directions. The riders divide. Each squad of hounds has a generous following. Keen-eyed these hounds run, never for a moment taking their glaring stare from the quarry, no matter how thick the thorny cactus grows. Silent; never a sound do they utter. Every energy is put into those long, slender, sinewy legs. Rapidly they gain, and make a short race of it. The swift greyhound, Leader, turns the snarling coyote, but is timid and dares not take hold. The next instant, two fierce borzoi hounds pounce on the shaggy gray-coat. They "string him out" amid growls, and flying fur. Three or four of the slower, stronger stag-hounds come up, and help crunch the bones of the limp coyote.

"This is royal sport," exclaimed the breathless fellow, who had been used to some rough polo riding at college. "But don't you save the brush?"

"And what's a *brush*?" asked the ranchman.

The tenderfoot showed him by dismounting and cutting off the coyote's much-mouthed tail. As there was no lady in the party, he dangled the bushy gray tail from his belt, and thus inaugurated a new custom among the coyote hunters.

Before the pack could be penned up again, the younger hounds started a jack. All the yelling and calling of screaming throats could not call them off. After a lively chase, the fleet hound, Fly, reaches the skimming jack; and as he turns, with one catching rip, the clasping jaws break his back. The jack dies without a squeal. The older dogs, trained by many a coyote hunt, let the smaller game go by, with nothing more than a sniff and erect ears. All the scattered hounds were corralled once more into the wagon-rack.

And now the party was trotting along in one of those huge hollows of the plains. Whenever the course crossed coyote tracks, still showing in the fast-disappearing snow, a clever little bitch, that was allowed to run, would bound up from the ground, trying to get a glimpse of the game. The rolling prairies are so formed that one never reaches their highest point. A prominent knoll in the distance, when reached, will always be overtopped by some higher point. It is this everchanging aspect and surprising nature of the seemingly monotonous plains that make them interesting.

The ponies were ascending just such a rise of ground, when the open view showed up a dog coyote, profiled against the blue sky. The hunters, as yet unseen, wound around an intervening knoll and came upon the coyote unawares. The dogs broke away. It was a short, sharp race, straight-away, without a turn. The animal was strung out and mangled before the riders could get up speed.

"That's a pretty quick catch, isn't it?" asked the college man, who was becoming the most eager hunter of the mall.

"Yes," answered Doc, as he paced it off with his eye; "that's only about a three-hundred-yard run, which is record distance."

"Stand off!" shouted the "fiend," as he focused his camera on the circle of hounds.

"My, he is a big fellow; how much will he weigh?" was the Easterner's next question.

The doctor dismounted, and began to drive off the dogs. It was all he could do to pull out the coyote and hold him up. "He'll tip sixty pounds," he answered with a strained voice. "He's an old offender, too. Look at his brown, spike teeth!"

"Hello!" said one, "there is a dog that got nipped; the one hobbling on three legs."

The dog-driver went over to the whining hound and drew out a cactus thorn from one of his paws, and added with a grunt: "He's all right now."

Hunger, made keen by the brisk air and vigorous riding, began to make itself heard by many side remarks. All agreed that this was a good place to camp for lunch. A neighboring ravine had given sufficient moisture to nourish a few struggling cottonwood trees. Some dead limbs were collected, and soon a curling tower of smoke announced camp to any wandering hunter. This midday meal, on cold turkey, fresh farm bread and butter, and clear hot tea, is one of the best parts of a hunting trip. All morning there is a delightful expectation, which one cannot quite define. It grows stronger as the noon hour approaches. We dislike to admit the fact, but lunch, no matter how plain, brings the expected satisfaction and a more contented spirit. A camp-fire warms the body and arouses conversation. Its crackle is sure to bring out some stories.

"You know," Judge began, "the coyote figures in the myths and religious history of the native races of the West and Southwest, like the reynard of European folk-lore. The coyote's secretive disposition, his cunning, craftiness, and his tendency to prowl around at night, naturally appeal to the imagination of superstitious races."

"Yes," spoke up the man versed in folk-lore. "Among the Mexicans their greatest mythological figure was Tezcatlipoca, who was thought to have created heaven and earth. The crafty coyote was dedicated to him, as presiding over darkness and all that is mysterious. In Central America the coyote was even honored with a temple, with priests devoted to its service, statues, and an immense tomb. Some of the Indians of the present day think the coyote created the world. We see them giving a divine origin to what most people consider a low pest."

Judge took up the conversation with some reminiscences about a tribe of Indians with the euphonious name of Gallinomero.

"While traveling among these Indians," he went on, "I learned that they considered the coyote responsible for pretty much everything that exists. Their legend is that a mighty flood drowned all living creatures except the coyote. Standing on a bit of high ground the crafty fellow collected the tail feathers of hawks, owls, and buzzards, as they floated by. These he planted, after the flood subsided, where wigwams had stood. The feathers sprouted, branched out, and finally turned into men, women, animals and birds. That's why we're here."

"You know the rest of the story, don't you?" asked Dot. "Well, seeing such famous results in the form of man, the coyote turned his efforts toward creating the sun and moon. He collected a ball of *tules* from a swamp and gave it, with some flints, to a hawk that happened to be soaring around. The bird flew up to heaven, touched off the ball of dry reeds and sent it whirling around the earth. This was the sun. The moon was created in the same way, only the *tules* were a bit damp and did not burn so brightly."

"The Navajo Indians attribute the origin of fire in part to the coyote," volunteered one of the circle. "Their

fable runs that fire belonged in common to the coyote, bat and squirrel. The brave coyote tied some pine splinters to his tail and dashed through the blazing fire. The splinters ignited. He turned homeward, but soon got out of breath, when fortunately the bat relieved him of the fire and flew till he dropped. Then the squirrel took up the torch and carried the blaze into the camp of the Navajos."

"That reminds me," said Billy Parks, "of what an old Navajo buck once told me. He said, after the sun and moon had been made, the 'old men,' his ancestors, began to embroider the heavens with bright stars of beautiful and elaborate patterns, like the Navajo blankets. When each star was in its proper place, the coyote rushed in and contemptuously scattered the lines of stars broadcast over the whole heavens, just as they now lie up there. Whenever there is a shower of meteorites, these Indians think a coyote is making another such scattering."

"It is curious," went on the expert in Indian mythology, "how strongly the red men cling to their hereditary superstitions about animals. Even their bows and arrows have a divine origin. To this day the Karoks believe the Deity once commanded the animals to appear on a certain morning to receive bows and arrows with which to hunt. The most powerful animal was to receive the largest bow, and so on, down the scale. The night before, all the animals went to sleep as usual. Not so with Mr. Coyote. He stayed awake all night in order to appear before any of the rest and receive the largest bow. Alas! he outdid himself with ingenuity, and fell asleep just before dawn. When he arrived, only the very shortest bows were left. But the god, Kareya, took pity on the coyote and gave him cunning ten times greater. This is how he became sharp-witted above all other animals of the plains."

"I guess that's right," added the cowboy of the party, "for a Miwok myth I once heard gives the coyote great cunning. They say the animals created man. Previous to this creation, the coyote called a council of all the animals. In the constitution of man, he advised taking the good parts of each animal and uniting them into a superior being: strong voice from the lion, lack

of tail, like a bear (since tails are only homes for fleas), the sharp eye of the elk, etc. 'In wit,' said he, 'I am supreme. Let him have cunning and craft from me.' Each animal wanted the pattern after himself, so the council broke up in a row."

"Let us break up," laughed Doc, "not in a row, but a ride."

Each man found his pony, browsing

About a quarter mile back the others had dismounted. They were stooping over the athletic student of the hunt. His horse had stumbled into one of the few holes that exist on the prairie. The fall winded him. The bottle for medicinal purposes only brought him round to consciousness. This was a final signal for the return. It was growing late anyway. The injured man,



THE END.

near by on the dry, brown grass. At once conversation was changed to keen watchfulness as they cantered along.

"I am going to be in first at the death this time," came the proud assertion of the tenderfoot, whose lower appendages were becoming tougher the more his mind was enlightened.

The horses bounded after the whole pack of hounds that had been let loose on a far-away coyote. Here was a chance for some stiff riding: down a ravine, up a sloping hill, across a little valley, and then open, clear running. The coyote turns, the ponies answer, as they are all galloping at full speed. A fierce borzoi is first to double the coyote, which is strung out flat the next instant. The riders follow after in reckless speed, with the Eastern friend winner by a narrow margin.

who was pretty well shaken up, rode home on the dog-wagon. The hunters trotted homeward, chatting, jostling, and careless of surroundings.

"They're off again!" shouted Doc. And so they were. Bounds, leaps, legs, hanging red tongues, white rows of teeth—all mingled together in a mad rush for another coyote. In a few minutes more, there lay the fourth and last coyote of the day's hunt.

As the hunters neared the ranch-house, and the prospects of food, the injured rider revived more and more. There was just time enough to swallow some red beef, smoking potatoes and hot coffee. No dish could taste better.

They all tumbled into the night train, with a good-bye wave to the ranchman. It was a happy, tired, satisfied crowd that rolled into Denver that night.

