

THE RAMBLER
IN
NORTH AMERICA:

MDCCCXXXII.—MDCCCXXXIII.

BY CHARLES JOSEPH LATROBE,

AUTHOR OF THE 'ALPENSTOCK,' ETC.

CÆLUM, NON ANIMUM MUTANT QUI TRANS MARE CURRUNT.

HOR. EPIST.

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distance from his night quarters. As noon approached and he had seen nothing of us, I believe some anxiety began to creep into his mind; when the shot was heard, and his rescue from his hungry and anxious position followed as related. He deserved and got great credit for his good sense and philosophy.

Our return to the camp was a matter of course. The Grand Canadian lay about three miles south, and some of us made a circuit in returning towards its banks. It is a powerful stream, and by far the longest tributary of the Arkansas. At this point it is surrounded on both sides by open prairies, and bounded by high sand-hills, from the top of which a large extent of its valley was to be seen, with groups of bison and wild horses scattered over it. This part of the country, as you will have gathered, still abounds in game. A small group of goats or antelopes was pointed out to me, but I was unable to approach them to give their figure or appearance with any distinctness. Large flights of starlings were everywhere seen, and numerous bands of snow-white cranes.

But, as an object of natural history, nothing diverted us more than a part of the smooth prairies near our camp, where, for the space of many acres, the surface was marked by the mounds raised by a strange little animal, vulgarly and absurdly called the prairie-dog.¹ They are a species of marmot, of small size, rarely measuring more than fifteen or

¹ *Arctomys Ludoviciana*.

twenty inches from the top of their nose to the extremity of the tail, with a large head, short ears, and longish body. Like the beaver, they appear to be republicans, living in large communities, in burrows spread under a wide extent of prairie. The sod within their territories was everywhere well-shaven and dry, and had all the appearance of being well-trodden. The opening to each burrow was seen at the top of a little flattened mound of the earth removed in making the necessary subterraneous excavations. In these they are said to live in families. They were very shy and difficult of approach for a man on foot, while at the same time a horseman could ride in among them without giving half the alarm; which was attributed to their being accustomed to the presence of the wild horses of the prairie.

It was amusing to watch their sprightly movements from a distance, and the cautious manner in which they would on ascending from their burrows, raise themselves upon their hind legs like a squirrel, and make a long neck, to see if the coast was clear. If they noticed distant danger, they uttered a sharp and singular bark, and never failed to make good their retreat. I noticed that they were very apt to fall foul of each other, and squabble and wrangle together like some of their republican neighbours more to the eastward.

Their burrows, however, serve for places of retreat to others besides themselves. The burrowing-owl, a distinct species, is frequently found in them, and the rattle-

snake and badger also. Our friend Irving threw light upon this singular fact, by shrewdly surmising that these strange gentry were probably the ambassadors and plenipotentiaries of foreign powers at the seat of the Republic; and I believe you will hardly find a more plausible one.

Our camp was that night once more a scene of good humour, contentment, and joyous pastime. Tonish had crowned the success of the day, by capturing another foal; and, in the best humour with himself, put forth all his cunning in the preparation of sundry delicacies, to the enjoyment of which no one had as good a right as Pourtales, after the preceding day's fast and redundant exercise. Though the barking, howling, and yelping, of the wolves seemed to be yet greater on this second night of their feast than the preceding, no one complained of being disturbed by it.

The sun rose bright and clear for the season on the following day; and shortly after, the turkeys and quails, whose call from the edge of the forest would have allured us to go after them at any other period of our tour, had returned to covert;—and as the morning advanced, preparations were made for a remove from our resting-place. It was the last day of October, and we were now to set out on our return home. Our actual distance from the Fort was not known, and in fact we found subsequently, that we had both further to go and more to go through, than we expected—in