

THE HYBRID WOLVES OF "GOSHEN HOLE."

By Nilmah Ednoc.

I HAD escaped from business long enough for a shooting excursion, and my comrades were Kennedy, a ranchman from Montana, and two others who, like myself, were fated to breathe city air for the greater part of the year. We had enjoyed good luck and good sport, and the evenings passed merrily in recounting experiences of other days, as is the custom with sportsmen indoors. One night during a lull in the conversation, Kennedy, who was an ardent sportsman, having bagged almost every kind of game the continent affords, including even Polar bears, and who is able to relate his adventures with zest-giving ingenuousness, filled his cob pipe afresh and remarked, "Boys, I can tell you a little story which is alike interesting to the naturalist, and the hunter, and I believe I'll do it in retaliation for the yarns you have inflicted upon me. My story also has the merit of being true in every detail.

"In the spring of 1883," said Kennedy, "a large brindled female bulldog ran away from Jack Hunton's ranch in Wyoming. She was very large and fierce, and weighed probably fifty or sixty pounds, Hunton's ranch was near what is known as Goshen Hole, a peculiar formation on the Platte River. Goshen Hole is only a hole when compared with an immense district, but in reality it is a strip of country beginning about seventy miles north of Cheyenne and extending northward to within a few miles of abandoned Fort Laramie. The strip varies from fifteen to twenty miles in width and is hemmed in on all sides by very steep hills, four or five hundred feet high. These hills are so precipitous as to afford only three known trails out of the Hole, and formerly this piece of land was an ideal hunting-ground, and, prior to 1883, a favorite grazing place for antelope.

"Some time after the disappearance of Hunton's bulldog, a party of hunters, who were seeking game in the Hole, came across animals which they supposed to be timber wolves, although they possessed noticeably strange traits. Instead of travelling alone or in pairs, as do wolves, these animals went in predatory bands numbering ten or twelve.

Neither did they evince the fear of man common to wolves, but on the contrary they seemed inclined to give battle upon little or no provocation. So much did they differ in their habits from wolves, that a hunter who killed one in self-defense, hacked off its head with his hunting-knife and carried it to camp for more careful examination. His friends had never seen anything like it, and they were unsuccessful in securing another specimen.

"When the hunting party returned home, its members spread the report of their queer game, and the sportsmen of succeeding years looked eagerly for this new quarry. I had the good luck to be with one of the parties which penetrated into these preserves. One day while hunting alone some distance from the camp, I ascended an eminence which allowed a wide view of the surrounding plains, and with my glass searching for a trace of game, discovered a black-tail deer being chased, apparently by a pack of hounds. To say that I was astonished but feebly expresses my feelings, for I knew of no hunting-party in the neighborhood. I naturally watched the chase intently. The course of the hunted animal was directly toward the place where I was standing, but, when it was about two miles off, the deer followed a circle of which the hill was the centre. The creature had evidently been running for some time, and was well-nigh exhausted. After making the circuit of the hill, it turned in my direction, but was pulled down by its tireless pursuers when only a quarter of a mile distant. From my elevation and nearness, I had an excellent opportunity of inspecting what had appeared, at a distance, to be hounds. My glass showed them to be a band of about fifteen animals, half bulldog and half timber wolf.

"That the cross between a bulldog and a large wolf might produce a breed of animals to be feared I will be readily appreciated. Impelled by curiosity, I approached close enough to attract the attention of the feeding brutes. They raised their heads and snarled, but made no move to abandon their prey. It did not take much reflection, although I was armed with a double-barrel express rifle,

to decide that I was hunting antelope, not wolves, and I modestly retreated. An old hunter will appreciate that this was a case where discretion was the better part of valor.

The animals, as well as I could make out, all had the square bulldog head, but were of varying build. Some of them resembled their wolfish forefathers in the shape of the body, while others had, in varying degrees, the bowlegs of their bulldog ancestress. Such of them as did not have the usual wolf color were brindled.

Of course, I related my experience to my companions when I returned to camp, and the next day members of our party tried to find some of the half-wolves, but without success, although we afterwards learned that three or four such bands roamed about in Goshen Hole, much to the destruction of game.

A week later I was riding in a part of the Hole some distance from the camp. One of our horses had strayed away, and I was in search of it. While riding over a low ridge of baked earth and rocks, which was near one of the small tributaries of the Platte River, I suddenly found myself in the center of a pack of about twenty of the brutes lying on the rocks, sunning themselves. With an angry snarl, a big one sprang from a rock not ten feet distant, and my horse gave a sudden jump that nearly unseated me, and then stood trembling in every limb, as growls and snarls came from all sides.

Instinctively my first idea was to exterminate the band, but a survey of the situation mastered any such inclination. While the animals made no attempt to attack me, they did not betray the slightest alarm at my presence, but remained where they were, contenting themselves with showing their glistening fangs as a sign of their displeasure. In moving away from one my horse accidentally came into close proximity with another, which sprang to his feet with hair bristling, and then crouched for a launch.

My horse now bolted like a flash up the hill, running several hundred yards before I could regain control, and then it was impossible to force him to return, although I was so angry as to be eager to do battle. To be sure I did not care to commence the fight when the entire pack was around me, but

with a selected battle-ground, I felt certain of victory, although I chanced to be only half-armed, I had left my rifle in camp to save carrying weight, but I had a 45-calibre six-shooter, an extra number of cartridges, and an eight-inch hunting-knife.

"Then you did not get a specimen to support your story?" interrupted a listener.

"Yes and no," continued Kennedy. "Before I left the Hole I got some revenge for the two insults. A few days before starting for home and after three sportsman-like attempts to obtain a specimen of this new species, I resorted to more certain, but not such admirable measures. Tying a bunch of deer entrails to a lariat I dragged it along the trail for several miles in the vicinity of my last adventure. Every few hundred yards I threw out a piece of venison in which I had cut a slit and inserted a pinch of strychnine. A close search the following morning resulted in the finding of one dead dog-wolf and traces which showed that another had received an overdose and escaped.

"No better specimen for my purpose could have been secured. It was a full-grown male, apparently three or four years old, and had some of the marks of each of the breeds from which it sprang. The head closely resembled a bulldog, but the muzzle was a little longer, and the fangs were exceptionally long and strong. In the shape of the body the wolfish characteristics prevailed, although the shoulders were thick and strong. In color there seemed a blending of the gray timber wolf and the brindled bulldog. I estimated the weight of the animal at seventy-five pounds, and it was an formidable a beast as a sportsman could desire to encounter.

"Our party stayed in the mountains until so late in the season that the snow caught us, and in the desperate struggle for life on snowshoes the entire party had in getting out, it became necessary to abandon the wolf skin, along with the other baggage. I am going after a specimen next September, and will stay in Goshen Hole until I get it."

As we made preparations for turning in, Kennedy remarked that the only other case of the inter-breeding of dogs and wolves had been reported from the Saskatchewan region, the canine ancestor in that case being an Eskimo dog.