

## IV. DANCE OF THE PRAIRIE CHICKEN.

BY CHAS. N. BELL, WINNIPEG.

At sunset on the evening of May 10th, 1873, near Saddle Lake (*Saw-gi-ah-gun Aspapowin*), which is twelve miles north of Upper or North Saskatchewan River, and ninety miles north-west of Fort Pitt, or in latitude  $54^{\circ}$  N. by longitude  $111.40^{\circ}$  W., I first had the good fortune to witness that most amusing dance indulged in during the spring season by the Prairie Chickens, when courting preparatory to mating for the summer. The Prairie Chicken, or Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Pediocetes phasianellus*)\*, the Pheasant of the Hudson's Bay Company residents, is called in the Cree, as well as in the Saulteau or Chippeway language, *akiskow* or *aw-kiskow*,—the Crees also using an alternative name for it, *pehayo*.

I had been without any food worth speaking of for some forty-eight hours, and was roaming about amongst the ponds and hills in search of game, feeling fairly used up with fatigue and hunger, when I heard a most peculiar sound, apparently coming from a great distance and resembling somewhat the murmur of many voices. At once taking cover in the willow brush, which grew in long patches in a depression between two rolls of the prairie, I quietly pushed forward in the direction from which the sound came. Every few yards I stopped to listen, thoroughly puzzled as to the cause of the extraordinary bursts of noise succeeded by perfect silence. Could it be Indians? A few Crees had passed my log wintering hut during the past week, and some of these might here be discussing a plan to rob the *moneass* ("stranger," or literally, "greenhorn") who was living alone forty miles from the nearest settlement.

I determined to find out what it all meant, so keeping my double-barrelled muzzle-loader in readiness, I dropped down on all-fours and quietly crept forward. For a few minutes all was very still and quiet, when suddenly, from a spot but a few yards a head, where I could see that there was an open space,

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\* The Prairie Chicken is a term applied to two different species of grouse—the Pinnated grouse or the *Tetrao cupido* of naturalists, and the Pintail or Sharp-tailed grouse of the text. In 1870, the Pintail only was to be found in the Northwest; but the Pinnated grouse advances with civilisation, replacing the Pintail.