

the hunters keeping at some distance to leeward of the trail, so as not to alarm the watchful animal even by the crackling of a twig. He was at length seen, but at too great a distance for a shot, sitting on his hams like a dog, and seemed at first in no hurry to rise; though, when at last satisfied of the character of his enemies, and his mind made up for flight, he got upon his legs; but even then, instead of bounding or galloping like other deer, he shuffled along so heavily, his joints cracking audibly at every step, that Mark was inclined to form but a mean opinion of the sport. Gradually, however, his ungainly speed increased, his hind-legs straddling from behind, as if to avoid treading on his fore-heels; and when a prostrate tree interposed in the path, he stepped over the trunk, however huge, without his flight being interrupted for an instant. It seemed, in fact, that smaller obstacles were more dangerous to the fugitive than great ones; for running as he did, with his nose up in the air, and his huge horns laid horizontally on his back—an attitude necessary, it is to be presumed, to sustain their weight—he could not see close to the surface, and on one occasion a branch which protruded only a few inches from the snow caught his fore-feet, and he rolled over with a heavy fall. The hunters thought they were now sure of their prey; but the caribou scrambled on his legs again in surprisingly little time; and as he pursued his flight with unabated speed, Matonaza seemed to derive some quiet amusement from the surprise of the Pale Face, as he found himself engaged in so difficult a chase of so apparently unwieldy an animal.

It was the policy of the hunters to turn the fugitive to where the snow was deepest; but as if knowing his danger, the caribou continued to keep on comparatively hard ground, and at length, by the intervention of trees and inequalities of the surface, he escaped wholly from view. His trail, however, could not be concealed; and for many hours his pursuers followed, well knowing that their quarry was only a short distance in front, but unable to obtain a glimpse of him. The trail at length appeared to turn towards a hollow, where the hunters might be tolerably secure of their prize; and the two friends separated, to make such a sweep as would lead them to the same point. Presently, however, the animal appeared to discover his imprudence; and at a moment when Mark was unprepared, he saw the huge creature returning on his own trail, and within ten or twelve yards of him. The rifle seemed to go off of its own accord, so sudden was the discharge; but the shot missed, and on came the caribou, its nose no longer in the air, but pointing full at its enemy, with the points and edges of its tremendous antlers in terrible array. Mark did not lose his presence of mind; but springing behind a young tree which was fortunately at hand, felt for a moment in safety.

It was not the antlers the hunter had to fear, for they were not used as weapons of offence; but the creature, determined to carry the war into the enemy's quarters, struck furiously at the intervening tree with his fore-feet, and Mark speedily found that its shelter would not long be between him and his justly-incensed