BIOGRAPHY OF A TAME COYOTE.

BY MADGE MORRIS

The shadowy gray coyote, born afraid,
Steals to some brackish spring and laps and prowls
Away, and howls, and howls, and howls, and howls,
Until the solitude is shaken with an added loneliness.

THAT is a good deal like us; we are a sort of "shadowy gray," like the twilight, and I think we are "born afraid." But a coyote will fight when it cannot do anything else, as I shall presently tell you. It is likewise true that we "howl and howl and howl and howl," and besides all these we are the most notorious chicken thieves on record. So you see, according as it is written down, I am a coward and a thief, but the Great Maker of all things made me a coyote, and I could not be a grizzly bear nor an honest little cottontail rabbit if I tried; therefore, I am a coyote to the best of my ability.

I never steal anything except to eat it; I never kill anything merely to amuse myself, and a coyote never slanders its neighbor—that was left solely for man and his mate to do.

Before I begin my biography I want to write that the name "coyote" is of Spanish origin and should be pronounced in three syllables. There is nothing so irritating to the nerves of a coyote as to be called a "ky-ote," though it is permissible to say it that way.

There is a tribe of Indians in the desert mountains beyond the southern end of the Sierra Nevadas whose name also is Coyote and to whom we are the sacred animal. They believe that when one of them dies his spirit lives for a time in the body of a coyote. One of my ancestors was brought up from the desert a captive, but escaped. He told us all about it. He said those Indians would kill a man who killed a coyote.

When Mrs. Coyote and myself began housekeeping we dug our home in the ground—a large, roomy room about six feet across the floor; we dug it deeper than the rain goes, so it was dry and warm, and we settled down to enjoy life.

It was a Saturday night; we had been living on rabbits and gophers and such things, and I said to Mrs. Coyote: "Suppose we have chicken for breakfast?" There was a farmhouse about two miles away where there were some delicious fat ones, but they roosted on a tree; we could never hope to get one out of it.

Mrs. Coyote laid her little paw on my shoulder and said very pathetically, "I do want chicken for breakfast."

I thought a minute or two and then I whispered a plan to her that made her laugh.

Just at the peep of day we stole out together and went swiftly toward the farmhouse. Chickens are very foolish things; they fly down from their roost and go "boging" around, poking out their necks to find something to eat when it is so early they can only half see, and it is no trouble at all to slip up and nab one. That was what I whispered to Mrs. Coyote that made her laugh.

Right in front of the house was a large wheat field, and the first thing the foolish chickens did when they came down from the tree was to go into the wheat, which was just a little higher than their backs.

We went boldly through the field until we were within about fifty yards of the house, then we crouched down and waited. We could see the chickens coming and we lay very low. When they were within a few yards of us, they stopped and began to scratch and pick the ground. Mrs. Coyote and myself looked at each other and smiled. We began to slip toward them. We did it so carefully and we were so nearly the color of the gray morning, they never suspected we were near. Then we made a grand rush and each one of us pounced upon a chicken and ran away with it. The other chickens flew against each other and squawked and cackled and got themselves into a great fright.

But the next morning they came out to the field just as early, and we were waiting for them and did the same thing which we had done the morning before. A chicken is such a fool!

Every morning for a week we went to the wheat field the same way, and every morning caught a chicken and ran away with it, and I suppose we would have kept on doing the same thing until the last of them was caught. But one morning when we nabbed our chickens and the others began to squawk and cackle, somebody banged away at us with a gun, and we knew the people at the house had found us out.

One day when I came home from a hunt Mrs. Coyote showed me five beautiful baby coyotes. She asked me what I thought of them. I looked at them across my nose—the way a grizzly bear looks at things—and then I told her that they were the prettiest young things in the world.

They looked "smart" from the very beginning. I had to hunt a great deal in those days. I brought them pig and duck and chicken and jackrabbit and gopher and squirrel and everything I could lay my teeth to. But one luckless night I killed a lamb that was somebody's pet. It was too big to carry home to my family, so I dragged it as far as I could and ate part of it myself. I left the rest for another meal.

I had grown very thin and gaunt even for a coyote. The next day I thought I would go back and eat some more of the lamb. When I was within a short distance of it, I saw a young man on horseback, whom I knew very well by sight. He was a very young man—not more than 15 or 16 years old; his name was Tom. He rode a fleet horse and a Spanish saddle, on which was always hanging a riata. A riata is a rope made of rawhide and braided round. Many is the time I have chewed one in two. This boy Tom had another rope on his horse, too; it was a hair rope and he used it for a halter. I had watched him making it with two sticks, the way the Mexicans make them. They are made of the manes and tails of horses. When I saw him, I stopped. He was sitting on his horse and did not seem to be doing anything, or intending to do anything, but I felt, somehow, that there was something in his mind about me. I had seen him run a young antelope down and throw his rope on it and carry it away on his horse. I knew if he ever got within the length of that rope of me, Mrs. Coyote would have to hunt for the youngsters alone.

I decided I did not want to eat lamb, and started away from it at my swiftest speed; even as I turned, I saw him snatch the riata from his saddle and lean forward on his horse. I ran with all the swiftness that was in me; but steadily, steadily, the horse gained on me. I could hear his hoofs beat the earth. I was a long way from home and no friendly coyote den lay in my path. It was a long stretch of bare, level plain; we had run a mile; every moment the distance between us lessened.

I heard the whir of the riata as the boy swung the loop round, making ready to throw it; then the hiss of it through the air, and thwack on the ground the loop fell all around me. I bounded through it and tried to run faster. The horse did not slacken his speed. The boy recoiled the rope, and made another loop as he ran; I knew just what he was doing; I had watched him many a time.

Two more times he threw it over me, but I was so thin I leaped through it before he could jerk in the slack. The fourth throw caught both my hind legs in the loop. The horse went past me like the wind and the boy again coiled the rope as he flew along, but this time I was bobbing at the end of it.

He stopped and swung me up his horse's side by the heels. I bit the horse on the fore leg as I went up. And then I bit the boy's leg. My teeth are sharp and firm and I bite hard. He caught hold of me and lifted me to the saddle. I bit his arm and in the same moment jumped at his throat and bit the side of his neck. The blood ran down into his collar; he said something very roughly to me and asked me if I was going to eat him up. He crushed me between himself and the horn of the saddle and tried to hold me down with his arms. I snapped him in the side, under the ribs, where his flesh was thin; he put his hand around to catch my head and I bit his thumb; my teeth went through it, nail and all. He said the rough thing to me again. I really began to respect his pluck, but I did not stop biting. Finally, he got hold of my head and wrapped the hair rope he had for a halter around my mouth. He wrapped it round and round, making a regular muzzle on me, and tied it fast. I knew it was all day with me then and I gave up. But I looked across my nose at him with some pleasure. I had bitten him nearly all over.

I supposed, of course, he would kill me, but he took me to his home and chained me to a stake in the back yard, and the only revenge he took was to cut off one of my ears.

I rather enjoyed myself. I had so much fun snapping the chickens when no one was looking. I would lie flat on my side, with my eyes shut, pretending to be asleep, and the silly things would mistake me for a dog. They would come up and pick around me without the least fear. Some of the little ones got so saucy they would hop up on me and pick in my ears. The people said: "How gentle the coyote is!" As soon as they were gone snap would go my teeth and down would go a small chicken.

The old gentleman who lived at the house and who was the father of the boy who had captured me began to suspect my treachery with the chickens—so many of them were missing—and when the boy was not at home he unchained me and set the dog after me.

I was very glad to return to Mrs. Coyote and the youngsters. We moved nearer the mountains.

Several years passed away.

I brought the news one day to Mrs Coyote that the Legislature of California had just passed a law offering $5 reward for the scalp of every coyote that could be brought in with both ears on it. She looked slyly at my one ear and said: "You are safe, my dear, in any case." I told her they would kill me before they would find it out. She thought the law a great joke, and she made up some poetry about it, which she repeated to me. I thought it very funny. I set it to music for her, and we went up on the top of a hill and practiced it with a great many variations of the tune. She called it "The Bounty Song." I will write it down:

THE BOUNTY SONG.

Five dollars is offered for me!
Why-ee-ee-oo-o-ee, for me—
Five dollars for me!
I'm a howling coyote.

Five dollars for my poor scalp!
Yip-you-ee-you-ee-oo-o-ee!
I dare not give a yelp,
But somebody snaps a trap for me-oo-ee!
I'm a howling coyote.

Yip—yip—five dollars for me!
Poison, ambush and gun,
Are making the roost of the chicken
Very poor pickin' for me, yip-yip-you-ee!
I'm a valuable thing to the State;
It offers a V for my pate—
Perhaps I'm to teach in the schools
The vowels by natural rules—
A-e-i-o-u-we-ye—
I'm a howling coyote.

The music which I made I doubt if any one but a coyote could sing—unless he were a very good ventriloquist.

As we came down from the hilltop we found two of our neighbors dead; their scalps were gone. We knew the invasion had begun. We were beset on every side—gun, trap, poison, everywhere; the joke was not so funny as it had seemed.

There were only myself and Mrs. Coyote left now, all of our youngsters having grown and gone their ways. So I said to her, "We will go to Arizona"; but the hunters had preceded us.

Before we reached the Colorado River they got Mrs. Coyote's scalp, and I was left alone. I thought I would go back across the desert and go up into the mountains where the Coyote Indians lived. A scalp hunter would hardly venture upon their ground. I stopped at a place called Seven Wells, and walked straight into a trap. I admired the cunning that had outwitted me.

When the man came to kill and scalp me there was another man with him. The other man said: "I'll give you $5 for the coyote and save you the trouble of scalping him."

A little round gold piece changed hands, and once more a chain was put around my neck and I was led away into captivity.

The man who bought me from the man who trapped me took me to a city on the bank of the great Pacific Ocean that is known by the name of San Diego, which in the English language is St. James. He sold me to a saloon-keeper. I slept in a barrel that was turned on its side and fixed so it could not roll and was fed nice beefsteak. In the day I was chained on the sidewalk in front of the saloon, so that people would stop to look at me.

They tried to teach me to drink beer, but I refused to learn. It was bitter, and I did not like it; besides, I had watched the effect of it on the men who drank it. A coyote always wants to keep his head right.

I have been with these people a long time now. They think I am tamed. They chain me to a dog and turn us loose in the street. A short-legged, big-bodied, ugly yellow dog he is, but a good-natured beast, and we get along very well together, except when I want to go one way and he wants to go another. It mostly ends in our going the way I want to go. His uncouth manners annoy me, too. When he drinks he does it so noisily you can hear him half way across the street. He could not get his big tongue into the glass that I drink out of. I lap the water the same way he does, but I do it daintily; my tongue is much smaller and more delicately shaped. However, with all his faults he is a better dog than I am.

Yes, they think I am tamed. They think I enjoy this sort of existence—the noise and the rattle and the crowds on the street, and to be stared at. They think I like to lap water out of a glass and smell beer and sleep in a barrel.

They do not know when the wind blows and the ocean roars that my bristles raise with the longing for freedom. They do not know when the twilight begins to fall how my foot soles tingle to bound over the plains and seek my wild den in the earth.

So I lie here on the sidewalk in the sun and listen to the buzzing flies, and they call me a tame coyote.

TIME WHEN BRET HARTE DROVE THE COACH.

BRET HARTE'S death recalls an incident which left its mark. Twenty years ago I was a traveler in a Western stage coach very similar to that which Colonel W. F. Cody exhibits in his Wild West. My fellow-passenger had done his best to be agreeable and had succeeded. Late in the day he told me the following story:

"I am afraid I have wearied you with so much talk. I confess it may have been selfish in me to have done so. But ever since a little experience I had in one of these coaches some years ago I have made up my mind to keep very much awake when I have but one companion, as I have had to-day.

"It was a stormy night that two passengers climbed inside of a coach like this which pulled out of a California town. I was one of the passengers. The other was disposed to be sociable, but I did not meet him. I quickly discovered that he knew how to talk, and that he was no ordinary pilgrim. But I was tired. I had had little or no sleep for three nights. I took it for granted that we would be together the next day and I resolved that I would show him then that I could listen.

"He seemed quite inclined, however, to be communicative. I fell asleep in the midst of several stories, which I knew were away out of the ordinary stage coach tales. But, in spite of this, I would fall asleep in the climax. When I would rouse myself my fellow-traveler would start on another story. While wondering how the previous one had ended I fell asleep in the same way in each succeeding story.

"Somewhere on the mountain road the storm passed, or we passed it, I don't know which. I remember I looked out and saw the stars. I looked up and saw the snow was glinting on the mountain tops. Then I noticed that my companion was gone. In his place was another passenger. I recognized him at once as the driver, or he who was on the box when we left earlier in the evening. He seemed to be asleep, but I was now wide awake. I shook him. It required some effort to bring him out of his stupor.

"'What are you doing in here?' I asked.

"He replied that he was trying to sleep, and did not know why he should not be permitted to do so.

"'Where is the passenger who got in here with me?' I inquired.

"'Drivin', up there; he knows the road,' was the answer I got.

"'Does the company allow its drivers to turn over the reins to any passenger who comes along, and does it permit its drivers to ride in the coaches?' I asked, somewhat indignantly.

"'To —— with the company,' he replied. 'The man that's out there on the box knows more about this country than the whole stage company. He's human, and that sort's skase. Understand? When we stopped back yonder to tighten a nut he got out and gimme a hand. We'd been thar yit but fer him. Then he fall to a questionin' me, and when he finds out I ain't had no lay-off in purty nigh fifty hours, he says to me: "Git inside thar and I'll see that we git thar," he says. "Go in," he says, "or I'll leave you on the road." So I got in. He got up. That's all that is to it. How do you like it? Ain't skeered, are you?'

"I made no reply. I crouched down in my corner and closed my eyes. It was daylight in the mountains when I awoke. The summits were aglow with sunshine. I was alone. Then we pulled into another wooden town, similar to the one we had left the night before. I got out and shook myself while the relay was being made.

"'Where's your partner who drove for you?' I asked the driver, who was biting off a section of long plug.

"'He left me some miles back,' was the reply. 'Said he had to do some business for the State. Said to give you his—I don't just remember what it was.'

"'Compliments?' I inquired.

"'That sounds somethin' like it. Reckon it was. Said for me to give you this when you woke up, if you ever did.'

"He handed me a card as he spoke. I did not recognize the name then, but I put the card away as a souvenir of the journey. Some years later, in looking over a bundle of papers, it turned up. The signature was a trifle dim, but there it was, written diagonally, 'Francis Bret Harte.' The card is under a glass paperweight on my desk in my office in Los Angeles. Money couldn't buy it. But think of what I missed in not staying awake."

FINES FOR ACTORS ON THE ENGLISH STAGE.

A RECENT conversation the writer had with an actor of versatile experience on the subject of stage offenses and their resultant penalties elicited the following authentic and informing details:

In order to insure decorous behavior in the theater and on the stage most managers have a code of rules for actors and actresses, and any breach of these regulations is punished by a fine in proportion to the offense committed. For example, if any actor or actress perpetrates the grievous error of "gagging" (introducing observations of their own which are not written in the play), the flagrant folly is brought home to them by the forfeit of a heavy fine—never les than a day's salary, and I have known some martinet managers who have made it a week's salary.

In many theaters it is a rule to fine an actor if he fails to take his "cue," and the delinquent in this case generally has to hand over half a crown. In one theater with which I am well acquainted it is permissible to send for refreshments of a certain kind, but meat and fish are strictly barred, and one unhappy culprit whom the manager found eating tinned salmon in a dressing-room had to pay a fine of 10 shillings and received a verbal castigation as well.

When a dramatic company is touring in the provinces it is often the rule for actors to find their own outfit, and under such circumstances a man may be penalized for not appearing in sufficient smart apparel for the part he is playing. In instances of this kind the fine is generally 5 shillings.

If an actor breaks the important rule which prohibits smoking in the dressing-room he lays himself open to a fine of a half-guinea at least, and a second offense will probably mean dismissal. Many managers are naturally severe on smoking because of the risk of fire, and I have known more than one man sent away for a breach of this reasonable regulation.

Bad language is the particular bogey of other managers, and if the dialect of an actor behind the scenes is unparliamentary and the expressions reach the ear of the manager the punishment is prompt and emphatic. One actor of my acquaintance had to forfeit a week's salary for allowing his tongue too much liberty in this respect.

At one well-known theater, famous for its ballets, the ladies of the ballet are fined a florin if they are seen talking on the stage during a public performance, and any notable laxity in dress or demeanor is visited by a fine of a half-crown.

When rehearsals for a pantomime are proceeding there are some managers who are very severe on those who show lack of attention or who fail to perform their role with alertness. After one curt warning a fine of 5 shillings is sometimes demanded in cases where the culprit repeats the offense.

One manager I know is a keen critic on the "make-up" of an actor, and any negligence in this respect is punished by a fine, which often means a day's salary. The old members of his company are aware of this managerial requirement and protect themselves accordingly, but newcomers are occasionally caught napping.

As an interesting contrast anent the opinion of certain actor-managers on the subject of jewelry, I may tell you that one gentleman has on more than one occasion fined the actors at his theater or displaying too much jewelry on the stage while another autocrat insists that the leading gentleman of his company shall wear a showy watch chain.

Unpunctuality is the particular aversion of a certain manager in the West End, and to "keep the stage waiting" is in his opinion the worst offense an actor can commit. Those who incur his wrath for this dereliction of duty have to forfeit three days' salary, and if the offense is repeated receive a week's notice to quit.—London Titbits.