

ADVENTURE WITH A GRIZZLY BEAR.*

I NOW took a long farewell of the horses, and turned northward, selecting a line close in by the base of the hills, going along at an improved pace, with a view of reaching the trading-post the same night; but stopping in a gully to look for water, I found a little pool, evidently scratched out by a bear, as there were foot-prints and claw-marks about it; and I was aware instinct prompts that brute where water is nearest the surface, when he scratches until he comes to it. This was one of very large size, the foot-mark behind the toes being full nine inches; and although I had my misgivings about the prudence of a *tête-à-tête* with a great grizzly bear, still the "better part of valor" was overcome, as it often is, by the anticipated honor and glory of a single combat, and conquest of such a ferocious beast. I was well armed, too, with my favorite rifle, a Colt's revolver, that never disappointed me, and a nondescript weapon, a sort of cross betwixt a claymore and a bowie-knife; so, after capping afresh, hanging the bridle on the horn of the saddle, and, staking my mule, I followed the trail up a gully, and much sooner than I expected came within view and good shooting distance of Bruin, who was seated erect, with his side toward me, in front of a manzanita bush, making a repast on his favorite berry.

The sharp click of the cock causing him to turn quickly round, left little time for deliberation; so, taking a ready good aim at the region of the heart, I let drive, the ball (as I subsequently found) glancing along the ribs, entering the armpit, and shattering smartly some of the shoulder bones. I exulted as I saw him stagger and come to his side; the next glance, however, revealed him, to my dismay, on all fours, in direct pursuit, but going lame; so I bolted for the mule, sadly encumbered with a huge pair of Mexican spurs, the nervous noise of the crushing brush close in my rear convincing me he was fast gaining on me; I therefore dropped my rifle, putting on fresh steam, and reaching the rope, pulled up the pocket-pin, and springing into the saddle with merely a hold of the lariat, plunged the spurs into the mule, which, much to my affright produced a kick and a retrograde movement; but in the exertion having got a glimpse of my pursuer, uttering a snort of terror, he went off at a pace I did not think him capable of, soon widening the distance betwixt us and the bear; but having no means of guiding his motions, he brought me violently in contact with the arm of a tree, which unhorsed and stunned me exceedingly. Scrambling to my feet as well as I could, I saw my relentless enemy close at hand, leaving me the only alternative of ascending a tree; but, in my hurried and nervous efforts, I had scarcely my feet above his reach, when he was right under, evidently enfeebled by the loss of blood, as the exertion made it well out copiously. After

a moment's pause, and a fierce glare upward from his blood-shot eyes, he clasped the trunk; but I saw his endeavors to climb were crippled by the wounded shoulder. However, by the aid of his jaws, he just succeeded in reaching the first branch with his sound arm, and was working convulsively to bring up the body, when, with a well-directed blow from my cutlase, I completely severed the tendons of the foot, and he instantly fell with a dreadful scouse and herifile growl, the blood spouting up as if impelled from a jet; he rose again somewhat tardily, and limping round the tree with upturned eyes, kept tearing off the bark with his tusks. However, watching my opportunity, and leaning downward, I sent a ball from my revolver with such good effect immediately behind the head, that he dropped; and my nerves being now rather more composed, I leisurely distributed the remaining five balls in the most vulnerable parts of his carcass.

By this time I saw the muscular system totally relaxed, so I descended with confidence, and found him quite dead, and myself not a little enervated with the excitement and the effects of my wound, which bled profusely from the temple; so much so, that I thought an artery was ruptured. I bound up my head as well as I could, loaded my revolver anew, and returned for my rifle; but as evening was approaching, and my mule gone, I had little time to survey the dimensions of my fallen foe, and no means of packing much of his flesh. I therefore hastily hacked off a few steaks from his thigh, and hewing off one of his hind feet as a sure trophy of victory, I set out toward the trading-post, which I reached about midnight, my friend and my trusty mule being there before me, but no horses.

I exhibited the foot of my fallen foe in great triumph, and described the conflict with due emphasis and effect to the company, who arose to listen; after which I made a transfer of the flesh to the traders, on condition that there was not to be any charge for the hotel or the use of the mule. There was an old experienced French trapper of the party, who, judging from the size of the foot, set down the weight of the bear at 1500 lbs., which, he said they frequently over-run, he himself, as well as Colonel Frémont's exploring party, having killed several that came to 2000 lbs. He advised me, should I again be pursued by a bear, and have no other means of escape, to ascend a small-girthed tree, which they can not get up, for, not having any central joint in the fore-legs, they can not climb any with a branchless stem that does not fully fill their embrace; and in the event of not being able to accomplish the ascent before my pursuer overtook me, to place my back against it, when, if it and I did not constitute a bulk capable of filling his hug, I might have time to rip out his entrails before he could kill me, being in a most favorable posture for the operation. They do not generally use their mouth in the destruction of their victims, but, hugging them closely, lift

* From Kelly's "Excursion to Calif. mts."

one of the hind-feet, which are armed with tremendous claws, and tear out the bowels. The Frenchman's advice reads rationally enough, and is a feasible theory on the art of evading unbearable compression; but, unfortunately, in the haunts of that animal those slim juvenile saplings are rarely met with, and a person closely confronted with such a grizzly vis-à-vis is not exactly in a tone of nerve for surgical operations.