

## A BEAR HUNT IN MEXICO.

BY C. H. BUFFETT.

In the early part of the past summer I started from our camp in the Cananea Mountains for Ojo de Agua, a ranch on the head-waters of the Sonora River, for the purpose of getting ash timber to use in repairing our ore wagons. I took with me a sixteen-mule team, two teamsters, and Manuel, a Mexican guide. It was soon after the outbreak of the Apaches, and the possibility of a brush with them gave a touch of excitement to the trip. It was a glorious morning when we passed through the cañon and out onto the *mesas* beyond the Cananea ranch. The air in these high altitudes is wonderfully clear, and the mountains were sharply outlined against the blue empty sky, only the most distant—such as the Baboquiveri Peak, one hundred and forty miles away—having the dim haziness which a very few miles suffice to give in the Eastern States. Fifteen miles to our north rose the Huachuca Mountains, bold and rough; to the northeast the San José range, with smooth, gently rising ridges centering in one high peak; in front of us the great Ajos, broken here and there by deep, dark cañons; stretching away to the south, range after range of the rugged Manzanal and Bacanuchi mountains, while behind us, and fairer than all, the precipitous peaks of the Cananea and Maraquilla ranges, clothed with pine and mountain oak. Ojo de Agua lay fifteen miles away to the eastward, and as a mule team is rather the reverse of speedy, it was a full day's drive. Part of the time I spent scouring over the *mesas* on my buckskin mule, part lying in an improvised hammock in the wagon smoking cigarettes and listening half understandingly to the tales of Apache horrors, of which Manuel apparently possessed a full complement. At about five o'clock in the afternoon we passed into the bright green valley where the waters of the Rio Sonora first sparkle and gleam in open sunlight. Hundreds of cattle were quietly browsing among the rich grasses, a large band of sheep and goats was scattered over the hill-sides, while near the corral and buildings belonging to the ranch a number of hogs were rooting in the rich black loam. The ranch was owned by the late General Pesqueira, who for many years held the

gubernatorial chair of the State, regardless of elections or the claims of would-be successors so long as he had in his own hands the exchequer and retained the fealty of the State troops. He was prominent in the war with the French, and always had a wonderfully strong hold of the hearts of the people. To return, however, to the ranch. There are there but three or four buildings, made partly from *adobes* and partly from lumber brought from the general's mill in the Cananeas. Across the narrow valley, having a commanding position on the crest of a small steep hill is an old *muralla*, where, from behind the thick *adobe* walls, the Mexicans have many times in years past withstood the attacks of hostile redskins. It is now tenanted, and a picturesque object it is, its barren, windowless, clay-colored walls and the dry sandy hill on which it stands forming a strong contrast to the living green of the valley at its base. At the ranch all was excitement. A courier had been sent from Tombstone warning the people along the Rio Sonora that a band of Apaches was bound that way, and the fear of an Indian is as hereditary in the ordinary Mexican as is his disregard of the cleansing properties of pure water. They had been intending to leave the stock and take refuge in the Cananeas, but our arrival reassured them, and with the addition of four to their number they grew very brave and apparently would have welcomed an attack. We brought the wagon to within a few rods of the buildings, unhitched and hobbled the mules, and set about cooking supper. And having fasted since early morning, our bacon, fried potatoes and *tortillas*, supplemented with a large jack-rabbit that I had knocked over while on the road, formed a meal that was little less than a feast. A large piece of cake, that had been tucked in with our supplies, I sent to a dark-eyed señorita, of whom I had caught occasional glimpses at the house, accompanying it with as profuse compliments as my limited knowledge of Spanish would permit. My messenger soon returned bringing me a large slice of soft colorless Mexican cheese and an invitation to the house, of which I availed myself after finishing supper. While eating, three or four *vagueras* sat around us

watching with great interest the way in which we disposed of the edibles, and accepting gratefully whatever we chose to offer them. Going to the house I was cordially welcomed by Romo, the *mayordomo* of the ranch, and you know the style in which this *mayordomo* lived, a man having control of thousands of acres of fine land and over four thousand head of cattle? Picture to yourself a frame building about eighteen feet long by twelve or fourteen wide, built of rough boards, with but one door, no windows, and but the ground for a floor. And in this barn-like room lived the *mayordomo*, with his wife, sister-in-law, daughter and three small children, and to this came also the *vaqueros* for their meals. A small hole in the ground in one corner served as fireplace, the smoke escaping through the numerous cracks and chinks in the sides and roof of the building. There was one large rickety table, two rough chairs, and a small bench—other furniture there was none. Beds were made on *petates* laid on the floor. Yet the *mayordomo* was as pleasant and genial a man as one would want to meet, and a very jolly evening we made of it. In spite of their hard life of hunger and privation, there are few classes of people that can get so thorough an enjoyment under adverse circumstances as these Mexicans. Early the next morning we started for our timber. After following the river for a mile we turned to the west through a broad cañon, coming out into a round little valley; half a dozen steers were luxuriating in the grass. Crossing this we came to a narrow cañon where a thick growth of underbrush barred the further progress of the wagon. To this point we intended to snake out the timber, and leaving the men to unhitch the team I rode down to where we would do our cutting. For a few rods it was difficult to force my way through the dense brush, but beyond that the growth was larger and the ground comparatively clear. Stopping besides a tiny stream that was carefully picking its way, through the cañon, I dismounted, made the mule fast, and taking my small saddle carbine from its sheath, laid it at the foot of a tree. Turning again to the mule I took off the bridle, hanging it on the horn of the saddle, and was just loosening the *cincha* when I heard behind me a succession of low deep grunts. Quick as thought I sprang for my carbine, and as I turned, saw, not over fifteen yards away, a large black bear waddling toward me in his slow,

sluggish fashion, his head almost touching the ground and rolling from side to side, while his keen little black eyes shone like two sun-touched beads of jet. With a slight tremor I grasped my gun, sank on one knee, and taking careful aim at his left shoulder, fired. With a growl he fell to his side, turned himself half round, and then was up and away, not very sluggish now, and heading down the cañon. Not so quick was he, however, but that I had thrown another cartridge in the barrel of the carbine, and before he had gone six feet I fired again. You can imagine with what joy I saw where my bullet barked a cottonwood six inches above the bear, and a few feet beyond. At full speed I followed the bear, getting a flying shot just as he turned into a narrow box cañon. I went to the entrance of it, noted the tracks, as big as a man's, with here and there a drop of bright red blood. Certain that he would not return to the mouth of the cañon, and be even less liable to take to the open *mesas* above, I hastened back after the men, partly because I feared they might think I had run foul of an Apache nest, partly because I might find the bear in a lair from which it would be ticklish work to dislodge him. I met the men half way back to the wagon, and returning tracked the bear some three hundred yards up the box cañon over rocky, almost impassable ground. Coming then to an almost perpendicular cliff we saw in its face, some fifty or sixty feet from the bottom, an opening, well protected in front by a couple of large boulders. Up to this from one side ran a narrow steep trail, almost inaccessible to man, and at the foot of this were marks of blood. "We've corralled him now," said one of the men, "but how'n the devil we're a-going to get the cuss out o' that hole is more'n I know." but the other teamster was carefully climbing the opposite side of the cañon to get on a level with the hole. "Stay where you are," he at last shouted, "I see him." "No es bueno," muttered Manuel, and he started up the cliff after the teamster in order to be farther from the bear. The remaining man and myself kept our places, though for my part I confess I hardly enjoyed the prospect of having that bear come down almost on top of me. Bang, went the teamster's rifle, and a snarl and a growl told us that the bullet had probably found its mark. Bang! "Damn it!" we heard him exclaim. Bang! "Look out!" he yelled, and at the same instant our jumped

the bear, coming down with the speed of a locomotive. Three bullets from my *compadre's* Colt's revolver and two from my carbine met him on the way, and when within fifteen feet of the bottom, his legs gave way under him, and rolling over and over he brought up at our very feet. He made one last effort to rise, but his strength was gone, and a bullet through the brain quieted his struggle. Then we sat down for a rest, the perspiration trickling down our faces and our hearts seemingly scoring something over a hundred beats to the minute. When we reached the ranch that night great was the admiration of the

Mexicans, and greater still their gratitude, when we gave them the forequarters of the bear. Early next morning we started on our homeward way after saying good-bye to Romo and his family. I saw Romo but once after that. On the afternoon of the 20th of July word was brought into camp that Gilliam, a prospector, had been killed or wounded by Apaches down in the terrible Jaralito Cañon. That night about eight o'clock fourteen of us started out to find him. At midnight we came across his body, and near it that of Romo, lying cold and still in the silver moonlight. Both had been struck down by Apache bullets.



READY FOR THE START.