

## LOST IN THE ROCKIES; A MIDWINTER HUNT.

BY ROBERT SALE HILL.



WHAT do you say to taking a week off in the mountains with the chance of getting some sport and perhaps a shot at big game?"

This question was put to me one bright sunny day in the middle of December, 1889, by a friend whose vocation was the pursuit of Blackstone, but who, like myself,

felt that a little recreation would in nowise interfere with the search after knowledge or the more material pursuit of bread and butter. There was certainly no man I would have singled out more willingly for such a trip than Ralph Harley, who made me this proposition, and, as much as my wife naturally objected to being left alone with only a son and heir and maid of all work for companions, there was no friend of mine whom she herself would sooner have selected for that close companionship which such a trip entails. Ralph Harley was no ordinary man. A lawyer by profession and successful in every way, he was at the same time one of the few men one meets in everyday life who, without professing religion or making one feel that he is altogether too good for this world, lived a life worthy of emulation.

Ours was a friendship dating back to my first arrival in Montana and a real-estate transaction from which we both derived considerable benefit. Probably no one in H— was socially more popular than Harley. No club meeting or dance committee was complete without his name, while any worthy charity, and many perhaps not quite deserving of the name, found in him an able coadjutor and friend. I always found in him a companion and a man to be trusted in every way.

It was therefore with a feeling of pleasure that I accepted the proposal and

hastily got my traps together in a weather-beaten valise, in which my wife, with true womanly solicitude, secreted a variety of articles which could only prove useful as a reminder of home. We started out at daybreak in a wagon provided by Jim West, an old-time hunter and prospector, who 'owned the cabin at the head of Avalanche Gulch, where for a week at least we were to make our home while in pursuit of black tail, bear or whatever else in the shape of game it might be our good fortune to come across. Jim's son Bill, a lad of fifteen, also accompanied us.

Jim West was a true type of a Western mountaineer, and at the early age of seven had begun to earn his salt by driving wagons across the trail at a time when these trips were not devoid of danger, and now at the age of forty-five he was about as perfect a specimen of manhood as anyone could wish to meet. Brave, hardy and generous, a dead shot and expert trapper, he had made the nature and habits of deer and bear a lifelong study, and withal was a man almost too modest to hear himself talk. Jim swore from force of habit, and even Harley listened to the strong expressions with which he rounded out his sentences without evincing any disapprobation.

Our drive of a little over thirty miles took us through some wild and extremely picturesque scenery; the steep declivities which carried us down one mountain only to give us an opportunity to struggle up another were exceedingly smooth and slippery.

"Greasy traveling for a toboggan, but not so chipper on wheels by a darn sight," as Jim remarked, after we had coasted down one rather steep hill sideways, very much as a crab turns a corner. Jim and his son Bill, however, evidently enjoyed our discomfiture, and the former, when we had reached the top of what promised to be a very abrupt decline with a long climb in perspective on the other side, totally ignored our extremely unselfish suggestion that walking would make it easier for the horses, and answered us that the "show-gun act would land us half way up the next hill 'in the wink of a blind mule's tail.'" Never hav-

ing seen a blind mule wink his tail, and being furthermore admonished "to hold on by my eyelids" while he showed us the trick, we succumbed to the inevitable and were presently conscious that Jim had released the brake and was now endeavoring to make the horses, who were young and by no means settled in their habits, beat the wagon in a race to the bottom, where a narrow plank foot bridge spanned a gulch which, to my rapidly departing senses, seemed deep enough to bury the whole party.

Glancing at Harley I observed the fixed and heroic smile that photographers persuade one to cultivate illuminating his otherwise immobile features. For my own part I was conscious of an almost parental desire to embrace Jim's son, who was lending an additional horror to the scene by hurling encouraging epithets at the horses, which, as far as I could see, kept jumping from side to side in order to avoid being struck by the heavy wagon thundering along in their tracks, Faster and faster we sped along until the creaking of boards and swaying of the wagon told me that we were crossing the bridge, and the next moment found us fully a hundred feet up the hill, with the horses straining, Jim swearing, Billy yelling and Harley still smiling, while I was conscious of trying to thaw out a whistle, to which I had contemplated treating them before we began the descent.

"A man don't know nothing till he tries the show-gun act" said Jim, turning to me for approval.

"No, quite a pleasant experience; very exciting, too," I ventured to remark,

Harley's smile withered me. "Any more hills like that one, Jim?" he asked.

"None as good as that, but we might take the road over the Devil's Gulch, barring that it's a bit out of our way."

"Don't try it on my account" I murmured. Harley still smiled and I began to dislike him for it—in fact was preparing myself to say something cutting about simpering, when a loud report disconnected my ideas, and, to our horror, we noticed that while our motive power continued on its way rejoicing we were slowly but surely gliding backward again toward that ill-fated bridge we had left behind.

"Traces broke, by gum!" was Jim's laconic remark.

"That's what!" said Billy, "Guess I'd better catch the colts, father," and so

saying he threw himself off the wagon, and, performing a sort of somersault, landed cat-like on his feet. "Hold on tight, fellahs!" was his parting admonition as he started up the hill in pursuit of the horses. My first impulse was to follow him, for it seemed unfair that a mere boy should have to do what was ostensibly a man's work. Second thoughts, coupled with the peculiar manner in which Bill had reached terra firma, together with the reflection that my wife and child were entirely dependent upon me for support, induced me to forego the attempt, and grasping Harley by the arm I followed Bill's parting injunction and held on tight. Fortune favored us, and a sudden dip on one side of the road encouraged the wagon to land us against two friendly pine trees, with no more serious result than the time lost in picking up the contents of the wagon, including ourselves. Harley's smile had vanished—he was also excited. Harley invariably stammered when he was excited.

"Wh-wh-what do y-you th-think of this d-d-dog g-g-gone nonsense?"

This was the nearest approach to an oath I had ever heard him utter, and was mentally comforted. "Why, lets stop it before we are rendered incapable" I replied.

"Y-you b-bet! S-say, y-you Jim, we came out here to sh-shoot, you idiot, not to br-break our necks."

"Oh, well," was Jim's quiet response looking up the road, "ain't been no broken necks around these parts, as I've heard on, at least, and a man don't know nothing—"

"Y-yes, th-that's all right; but we do know s-something, and th-that is th-that as we are p-paying for the pr-privilege we w-would rather d-do the sh-shooting ourselves than t-try any more of your infernal sh-shotgun games."

My admiration for Harley at the conclusion of this speech, delivered with all the dignity a stammering man could command, was profound, and it was evident to me that we had a great many ideas in common. Young Bill's return at this juncture cut short any further discussion and the balance of the day's journey was made without any noteworthy event. Jim maintained a dignified silence, unbroken save by an occasional semi-audible reflection that "most men don't know nothing no-how."

We stopped over night at a ranch kept

by an old German couple, both man and wife being exceedingly deaf. This, added to Jim's taciturn demeanor, prevented any brilliant conversation, and, being tired out, we turned in and were soon fast asleep. At 6 in the morning we were awakened by Jim's musical voice warning us that if we proposed to reach Avalanche Gulch by noon we had better get a gait on us. We accordingly scrambled into our shooting togs, and having partaken of a hearty breakfast were soon making the best headway we could in an uncertain light over what was apparently a very uneven road. Billy, coiled up at the bottom of the wagon on a heap of skins, which were to serve us in lieu of blankets when we reached our destination, was sleeping the sleep of the just. So much of Jim's face as could be seen, enveloped as it was in a huge buffalo robe, appeared a trifle more affable than the expression it wore after the shotgun disaster; but it was too cold to talk, and even my pipe failed to comfort me. With the rising of the sun symptoms of life became apparent. Jim borrowed a match and then damned his pipe for not drawing. Billy slowly uncoiled himself and then made a surreptitious descent upon some frozen peaches, while Harley and myself gradually warmed up on the subject of sport. Jim listened a while in silence, and then, turning around so as to command a good view of us both, said: "Say, did either of you ever kill more than a jack rabbit?" I ventured to remark that I had done more or less shooting all my life.

"Maybe," said Jim, "but warn't it tame shooting?"

"Well, partridges, quail, duck—" and I began to enumerate everything I could think of.

"But, say," said Jim, "nary a bear? Nary a buck? Nary a deer of any kind?"

"No," I replied, coming down a peg as every new specimen was mentioned.

"Well, then," said my interlocutor, "you ain't no kind of a hunter," and having delivered himself of this last shot he quietly resumed his former occupation of making his pipe draw.

Harley smiled, and I wanted to, but somehow found more consolation in admiring the landscape and the distant view of what proved to be Jim's hut, or, as Billy irreverently termed it, "Dod's mansion in the clouds."

Jim's hut or cabin was not calculated to accommodate many, for it consisted only of two rooms, with a stove in the front room and a shakedown in the rear. Neither apartment was overcrowded with furniture, and what little there was partook more of the useful than the ornamental character. Solid silver and cut glass were replaced by solid iron and cracked pottery ware; two chairs which had seen better days, the relic of a table and a seat made of an inverted barrel cut down constituted the furniture. An ancient stove, which seemed to depend upon its chimney for support, served the dual purpose of cooking and keeping the cold out. The stove smoked, but so did we. We brought nothing with us to table except our appetites, and, thanks to Jim's culinary skill, never carried these away. Manners gave place to good nature, and the early bird invariably caught the worm.

Notwithstanding the wintry aspect which the presence of snow in every direction gave the landscape, the sun made walking excessively warm work, and we soon had good reason to discard some of the heavy clothing we had brought with us. Jim's hunting costume, while perhaps not so remarkable for style, certainly combined economy with practical knowledge of what best served the purpose. His first anxiety was the larder, for he had to provide for four hungry stomachs for a week, and a change in the weather might make hunting difficult or dangerous. Jim, who knew the haunt and habits of every moving thing in the neighborhood, at once went off with Harley, leaving me to unpack and make the necessary preparations for the morrow, when the earnest of our sporting tour was to begin. In less than two hours I had the satisfaction of seeing them lay down at the foot of a huge tree enough venison to insure us against starvation, however our voracious appetites might develop.

Jim's forethought was amply justified, for before the morning the weather had considerably changed, and in the valleys especially we found the snow very deep. I was of course armed *cap-à-pie* and clothed after the artistic model of the city sportsman, who finds, alas, how vain are the supposed superiorities of his fashionable rig; in half an hour my high boots were full of melted snow, which, not being able to find an outlet, fraternized with my wool-

en socks, and gave convincing proof of its presence every step, and my hunting breeches above snow line became damp and froze in hard wrinkles, making walking painful.

Our first day's sport was consequently confined by the exigencies of the weather to a three-mile out and home tramp, during which, however, I had my first opportunity of deserving Jim's verdict that I was "no kind of a hunter," for I fired three shots in rapid succession at a black-tail deer, whose movements, to my bewildered gaze, resembled those of a bat in a dark room. That deer would probably be living now to adorn another "tale" had not Jim's unerring aim brought him down just as he was about to join his family in the heavy brush. The remarks made by Jim as I was discharging my Winchester were certainly more forcible than polite and contained as many swear words as I had cartridges in my belt. It convinced me, nevertheless, that it is not always wise to fire when you first sight your game, and this, added to the personal inconvenience I was suffering, almost led me to believe that a warm fire, coupled with domestic bliss, was, if anything, preferable to sport. Jim's advice, couched in the plain, terse language of unvarnished truth, compelled me to recognize the fact that "black tail cannot be approached by men who dunno nothing about their habits, and that shooting because your firearms are handy ain't no sure way of gettin' venison steak."

That night Jim explained a great many of the mysteries of the chase; how black tail will start at the cracking of a dry twig if the wind happens to be blowing from you to them, and, contrariwise, how you can get them in easy range by carefully observing from which way the wind is blowing; how by throwing yourself on your back and erecting one foot their natural curiosity will sometimes overcome their timidity and bring them within easy gunshot. Jim's interesting conversation was cut short by dismal groans from Bill, whose assiduous application to frozen peaches had taken the form of retributive colic. A doubly distilled dose of whiskey and abuse from Jim finally quieted his patient, and the last words we heard Jim utter before we closed our eyes were: "Well, I guess you won't fill yourself up with them froze peaches again nobow."

The next morning we sallied forth,

better prepared by careful attention to Jim's judicious advice to withstand the climatic conditions and refreshed by a good night's sleep, and, acting under Jim's orders, separated. A light fall of snow during the night had completely effaced all former tracks, and when we struck into the great pine forest which seemed to environ the mountains it was perceptible even to my uninitiated eye that an abundance of deer had recently been around, while some heavier tracks were cheerfully announced to be those of a mountain lion. Before we parted Jim pointed out what seemed to be a single trail running up one of the many ravines which intersected the mountain, and, bidding me follow it, urged me to move carefully and cautiously, avoid treading on dried twigs, keep my eyes open for mountain lion and not to waste my ammunition. Candidly speaking, I would far rather have remained with either one or the other of my companions, but Jim's word was law, and therefore, with what I conceived to be the careful study of a pleasant expression, I followed in the track of my game. When in quest of browsing land these deer invariably travel in Indian file, and the path they had taken led through thick brush, where more than once I found myself waist high in the snow. Suddenly I emerged into what seemed to be an opening into the very heart of the forest, and there within sixty yards of me were several deer quietly browsing in the covered glade. Instinctively I fell flat on my face.

The calm and unconscious attitude of the deer inspired me with the resolve to clear up my somewhat dubious record in Jim's eyes as a hunter. Steadying myself therefore, I drew a bead on the fattest buck in the herd, and, aiming at what I conjectured ought to be the region of his heart, pulled the trigger. With the crack of my rifle there came a crashing of underbrush and a scampering of feet, and, raising myself, I had the satisfaction of seeing his majesty bravely trying to follow the rest of his tribe. He was hard hit, but his movements, although crippled, were altogether too quick for me, and in my anxiety to administer the final *coup de grâce* I sprang forward and fell headlong into a heavy lot of undergrowth, only recovering myself in time to find the game was gone. The heavy brush beyond the opening was almost impenetrable, and it

seemed as if he could not have made his way over it, but espying an opening I made a headlong dash into the chase and picked up the trail descending the valley. Impelled by excitement I paid but little attention to distance for some time. Finally, however, tired out and disgusted, the vision of a warm fire and something to eat induced me reluctantly to turn and retrace my steps, and it was only then that I began to realize the situation. To the right and left, before and behind me, heavy underbrush and giant boulders, backed by a dense forest of pines, stretched as far as the eye could see.

In truth it was a wild and desolate spot, fitted by nature for the home of mountain lion and bear, but hardly an appropriate resting place for a hungry man. The cold air penetrated my damp clothing, as the glow caused by my previous exertion subsided, benumbed my limbs, and soon made me shake as though I had the palsy. Which way to turn was a mystery, for without a compass north, south, east and west were equally indefinite directions. Even if I had possessed a compass, my knowledge of the local geography of the Rockies was at best extremely hazy. My presence of mind, however, did not desert me. My first instinct was to discover some sort of a shelter where I could light a fire, and if possible thaw myself out. I fired off my rifle repeatedly, and the report was re-echoed by a dozen neighboring hills, but at last it became palpable enough to me that if the

reports were heard it would be quite as difficult to find me as for me to make my way, and that ammunition was too valuable to waste. I had now been eight hours without food, and the prospect of a whole night with neither food nor shelter in a wild forest was enough to make even a hardy mountaineer shudder. It seemed to be growing colder and darker every minute, and each rustle in the brush made me start uneasily and grasp the rifle which my benumbed fingers could hardly hold. In moments like these a man fully realizes his utter helplessness. Thinking that a smoke might assuage my hunger I filled my pipe and began feeling for a light, when, to my horror, only six matches rewarded my search, and three of these were too damp to ignite. Realizing that a fire might mean life, I concluded to forego the pipe until the fire had been procured.

An opening in the trees on my left at last promised a glimpse of the surrounding country and an opportunity to make the most of the fast waning light, so, painfully and slowly, I dragged my weary limbs toward this break in the otherwise interminable forest gloom, and with every step my imagination pictured the crouching mountain lion stealthily dogging my footsteps. With the clearing came a faint glimmer of light, although the sky was overcast and gloomy and the shades of evening rapidly setting in, and anything beyond the fact that I was apparently on the brow of a mountain, with a deep,



heavily-timbered gorge running down at my feet, it was impossible to make out.

The clearing where I stood was knee deep in snow, and I was about to retrace my steps when my attention was arrested by what seemed to be a Pathway cut through the underbrush, and as I eagerly followed it and entered the wood beyond felled timber indicated that woodmen, at least, had penetrated this wild region, and, seeing a clearing in the woods ahead of me, I pursued the trail, when to my delight, half hidden under a projecting pile of rocks, a rough log cabin suddenly confronted me. What it might contain was a matter of little moment to a man in my situation. It at least would afford shelter from the cold, which on a night like this meant death. With my rifle ready for immediate use, I crawled through its entrance and lit a match. By the dim light thus afforded I was able to see that the hut was deserted.

There was danger, nevertheless, from the fact that it might be the temporary lair of some wild beast. Groping around in the dark my hand came in contact with something cold, which further investigation proved to be an old stove, broken down apparently, but still capable of being used. The next thing to find was kindling wood. Everything in the way of brushwood was too damp to burn, but I found some comparatively dry chips, and with these and some old letters I was in hopes I could start a fire and trust to Providence for the rest. Having laid my fire I applied my first match, which promptly went out. My second started a blaze which enabled me to see a lot of dry wood and straw heaped up in one corner of the cabin. Eagerly I secured the prize, but in my overanxiety and nervousness I put on too much fresh fuel, and slowly the little flame flickered and died away.

Without a match left, with no fire or means of igniting one, with clothes wet through and in some places frozen so stiff that any sudden movement gave me pain, with nothing to eat, not even a drop of whiskey to give me temporary strength, in an old, deserted cabin which, for all I yet knew, might be the temporary residence of some mountain lion that would unquestionably dispute my rights and title upon his return home, is it a wonder that my mind reverted to my own comfortable little home with a warm fire, good dinner, and the sweet voice of my wife singing a lullaby to our little one? What if I should

never see them again? And what more likely, lost as I was in a wilderness of pines?

It is astonishing the strength which such despair lends, and, even while my limbs seemed to fail me, these thoughts brought back my energy. I began to grope around in the dark, feeling my way and guiding myself by the cabin wall, while something very like a prayer rose to my lips and gave me the consciousness of a new strength. A rough plank bed half covered with straw occupied one corner, and as my hand wandered about the rude couch it encountered a plank jutting out from the wall, evidently having served the purpose of a shelf. Feeling along its surface I found a bottle with the butt of a candle answering the purpose of a cork. Then, like a flash, came the inspiration, where a candle had been left why not a match, and I began my search again with renewed hope, until, with a cry of delight, my fingers came in contact with what proved to be three or four matches. Carefully I selected a dry spot and rubbed first one and then another with no effect, but the last one just emitted a faint phosphorescent gleam and then burst into flame. No man, even in a strong wind, ever shielded a match more carefully than I did this waif, and as it flared up I lit the little candle and then applied myself to making the fire. By the dim light afforded I was soon able to collect a stoveful of inflammable material, together with some good-sized wood, and in a few minutes the old stove was glowing inside in a manner that would not have disgraced it even in its palmiest days.

Sleeping being out of the question, my first care was to get off my heavy, frozen boots, and then, having made the door of my castle secure, I threw my weary bones down upon the rough plank bed and indulged myself in the luxury of a pipe. How I passed the long vigils of that sleepless night would hardly be of much interest to the average reader. I smoked, fed the fire, and smoked again, while suffice it to say my thoughts took a more serious vein than I would have believed them capable of doing, and when the morning came it brought with it at least the dawn of hope. In my weak condition getting into my boots proved a difficult task; they were frozen so stiff that I was compelled to pull them half on

and then stand in the glowing ashes raked from my fire in order to thaw my feet back into the unyielding leather.

As the sun rose I started out, and at once perceived that the track I had taken toward the hut extended back over the mountain side in the direction from which I had originally come. So I hastened to follow it, firing my rifle at intervals as I went along, and upon reaching the summit was fairly beside myself with joy to hear answering shots—no echoes this time, but genuine powder—while presently, about a quarter of a mile below me, I discovered Harley and Jim, with two horses fully equipped. Our meeting was a strange one; little was said, but the tones of Harley's voice as he said, "Thank God, old man, we have found

you alive!" still ring in my ears, and the grip of Jim's hand spoke volumes. A drink of whiskey and a sandwich revived me greatly, and I was able to tell them my experience as we made our way back to Jim's hut; Jim said that in all his wanderings he had never even guessed as to the existence of such a cabin, while Harley simply then remarked it was providential; but when we got back to Jim's cabin, and while he was preparing me something to eat, Harley, his voice breaking with emotion, told me of a sleepless night spent in prayer to the only Power that could save me, and in this grand belief he had grounded his faith. Jim had given me up, for, as he said, no mortal power could save a man who was lost in the Rockies on such a night.

## DAYS OF GLOOM.

For days and days the cold rains fiercely pour,  
And winter's chilling gusts make sullen moan;  
Their outstretched arms the tall firs raise and lower,  
As if to silence that dull monotone.

From steep hillside a swollen streamlet leaps,  
And bears upon its breast decaying weeds;  
Across the marshy land it softly creeps—  
A yellow snake amid the slender reeds.

Ofttimes when gloomy clouds do slowly lift,  
I hail the distant peaks like friends long dead;  
Above their dark-blue tops the fog will drift,  
And wrap white turbans 'round each lofty head.

No song of bird steals from the sombre wood,  
And save the mournful wind there is no sound;  
Where once the fragrant flowers in beauty stood,  
Great heaps of leaves now robe the sodden ground.

A lonely grave upon a dismal height  
Has blasted fondest hopes of future years,  
And through these weary hours of storm and night,  
My eyes are filled with bitter, blinding tears.

HERBERT BASHFORD.