

## ONE BEAR STORY.

BY JOHN K. JOHNSON.

OF all the aggravating, belittling and self-conceit-knocking occupations a hunter can engage in, the most so is the hunting of bear in the Bad Lands, or along the rivers in Montana.

If you arm yourself "for bear," and take a fresh trail and get him started, he will take you into brush so thick you couldn't fall down if you were to try. If it happens to be a hot day, you will hear him panting and breaking brush, as though he was about gone, and waiting for you to catch up to him. Yes! that's just what he has done; of course he has stopped, or you could still hear him. And while you are getting your gun ready and straining your eyes to catch a glimpse of your victim, you will, if your bear is an old one, be paralyzed to hear a short, fierce snort within ten feet of your ear, and from directly behind. You think now you will surely have a shot, and maybe a tussle besides, but you will not see or hear anything; and, while you are awaiting developments, for five minutes or so, according to the state of your nerves, you will wander how you ever happened to be hunting bear at all, let alone in this place. When you have found that the bear has gone, and it begins to dawn upon you that, as an animal twice your weight and size can move through that brush without a particle of noise, and very fast too, while this same brush is next to impassable to you, and even when you do manage to take a step it can be heard for a quarter of a mile, then I say the chances are nine out of ten that you go back to your camp without seeing your bear, and, what is more, mighty glad you didn't, and feeling generally as if you have something that doesn't belong to you and are afraid some one will see you with it.

So you dismiss the subject from your mind for the present, and, as you want something in the way of game to fry for supper, you take your shot-gun, loaded with No. 8 shot, and go down the river to a patch of bulberry bushes, where you have always seen plenty of sage hens and chickens. It's only about a quarter of a mile from camp. You are there now, have gone through and all around it, without seeing a thing. Well,

here's more luck—bear all left, and now the sage hens and chickens have left too. Supper of bacon and canned corn is pretty good anyway, so you give up for this time, light your pipe, tuck your gun under your arm and start for camp. You have no more than started when something makes your hair stand straight up and gives you a feeling of numbness all over, for, standing on his haunches, within ten feet of you, is a monstrous silver-tip, eating bulberries as unconcernedly as if there was not a human being within a thousand miles.

If, after you have watched the bear for a moment, you are brave enough to make a sudden noise, you will be rewarded by seeing the clumsiest and thick-headedest animal to be seen. Those little pig eyes will look straight at you without seeing you any more than if he had no eyes at all, and those little ears, half the size of an ordinary dog's, are doing their best to catch some sound of you again, but when he gets his nose pointed at you it will surprise you to see how it brings him to himself. When he has caught the faintest scent of you he is off with a crash like the falling of a large tree.

When you go back to your camp and have cooked supper (minus your fresh meat), and are sitting on a log by your cottonwood fire, smoking a well-seasoned cob pipe, you begin to feel good, and think you may amount to something after all; and as your opinion of yourself gets a fair start your opinion of bear grows correspondingly less. He can't be so very smart, or he would never have been surprised in that way.

Now you have hit upon the best plan in the world to hunt bear; wonder you never thought of it before. You are a first-rate shot from the saddle, can kill a coyote twice out of three times when both coyote and horse are in a dead run; your saddle horse is picketed or hobbled close by, and you can hardly wait until to-morrow evening to go and get you a bear.

In the meantime you clean up your gun, fill the magazine and also a belt so you will have plenty of ammunition; then you tie your rifle scabbard to your saddle, and you are ready.

About four o'clock the next afternoon you have found a fresh trail going up a cherry coulée. You know just where to find him, for he hasn't been up there over half an hour; you know just the high cut bank from around which you will come down upon him. Away you go at a high lope. You reach the cut bank, and are going around it at the same speed, when all of a sudden you lose your reckoning, for the bear has scented you from below and is just coming around that same cut bank to give you the slip. He is looking back to see if you are coming, and you are right upon him before you can stop; and then it is that something happens that is not provided for in your plans and specifications. Your horse, instead of shying to the other side of the coulée or turning sharp around and going back, as any ordinary horse of good bringing-up would do, just drops his head and humps his back and goes to pitching like he had never been saddled before in his life.

What do you think of those little pig eyes now? Do you think bruin sees you? Look about as big as saucers, don't they? And those ears as they lie flat down, don't they look as if they extended about half way down his back? And, say, how long did you say the hair on a bear's back is, when it is turned the wrong way?

All this has taken less than a minute. Perhaps now your horse slacks up enough to allow you to get your gun out, and if he will behave for a second you will try for a shot; but he doesn't. With a side bound he is off. You knew he could run some, but you didn't think he could make any such time as he is making now, and afterward you think you would like to go back and measure some of those ravines he jumped. You have got your gun in your hand, and you wish it was in its pocket; and while you are trying to hold or guide your horse with one hand, and hold a gun and keep your seat with the other, you will be surprised to find out how many times a heavy gun can hit you when a horse is going for life over a rough country. He now makes a quick turn, and away goes your gun, and if you ever find it again, which is doubtful, it will probably be in two pieces.

But time heals all wounds; you get over being lame and some time later you

get over feeling sorry you went bear-hunting. In, well, say about August of the next year, you will meet a ranchman who is a great friend of yours, and also a great hunter himself. He has been having wonderful luck getting bear, and maybe he has a half-dozen skins, counting cubs, with him for sale.

You will take him home to dinner, and at the right moment you will ask him how he does it. He will whisper just one word in your ear, "Traps," and then you will wonder at yourself again. Why! Of course traps are the only common-sense way to catch bear.

A day or two after this you are looking very wise. You have just ordered five or six forty-two-pound bear-traps, and when they arrive it does not bother you at all that they look large enough for an elephant dead-fall; the bigger the better, you think.

So you will get to looking about for places in which to set the traps, and will find a first-class trail to water, not a mile from the ranch. There will be plenty of tracks, among which are two little ones, and you will hope that the little ones will be good enough to mind their own business and not hinder the big ones about getting into your trap. When you get it there, and you will not see anything the matter with getting it there right now, you will maybe have a great surprise, in the way of a bear or two, for your friend when he returns.

The trap is gotten into place, and with your setting clamps you have no trouble setting it. It does you good to see those horrible jaws so full of teeth, now you are about to settle an account of long standing with the bear tribe.

You never thought of baiting the trap, but that doesn't matter; you go to bed that night feeling much like a boy.

Your friend returns that same night and at the first sign of daylight you get him up to go with you to the trap. When you are about half way there you hear a great noise, in the right direction, of threshing about and of chains rattling. No doubt about it this time; traps are the only thing. You are so tickled that you almost want to wait there and enjoy the sound, but you go on, with your gun ready to dispatch the victim. This will pay you for all the inglorious bear-hunts you have ever made. Here you are at the trap—and you have got one of your friend's best cows in it!