

gestion in great personal kindness towards myself, and I cannot sufficiently express my sense of that unwearyed good-will which has more than once called my attention to this subject. But I feel reluctant to undertake such a thing, for several reasons. In the first place, a project of that sort on my hands would be apt to make me abstracted, impatient of business, and forgetful of my professional engagements, and my literary experience has taught me that it is to my profession alone that I can look for the steady means of supplying the wants of the day. In the second place, I am lazy. In the third place, I am deterred by the difficulty of finding a proper subject. I began last winter to write a narrative poem, which I meant should be a little longer than any I had already composed; but finding that would turn out at last a poor story about a 'Spectre Ship,' and that the tradition on which I had founded it had already been made use of by Irving, I gave it up. I fancy that it is of some importance to the success of a work that the subject should be happily chosen. The only poems that have any currency at present are of a narrative kind—light stories, in which love is a principal ingredient. Nobody writes epic, and nobody reads didactic, poems, and as for dramatic poems, they are out of the question. In this uncertainty, what is to be done? It is a great misfortune to write what everybody calls frivolous, and a still greater to write what nobody can read."

As far as one is able to judge from the two or three hundred lines that remain of this poem, love was "the principal ingredient." The story involved the fortunes of a young man who sailed in the ill-fated vessel in which he experienced all the disasters of shipwreck, leaving behind him an orphan girl, to whom he was betrothed, who experienced the still more terrible disaster of captivity among the Indians—a scheme, it must be confessed, admitting of a good deal of wild romance and of vivid description of both forest and ocean. How the phantom element was to be brought in, is left to conjecture.

Mr. Bryant says, in the letter just cited, that he was deterred from prosecuting his design by the fact that Irving had "already

made use of the subject": but we cannot recall any piece of Irving in which that was done. Irving wrote a tale called "The Spectre Bridegroom," but that is of German origin, and has nothing in it resembling the legend which Mather reports. In his story of Dolph Heylinger, also, he refers to the Pilgrim superstition of a missing ship that re-appeared on the coasts, in bad weather, as a faith more or less prevalent in all the colonies, but he makes no use of it further than to remark upon it in the course of his narrative. Perhaps some of our readers can tell us more distinctly what it was in Irving that drove Mr. Bryant off the field.

A third one of his attempts related, as far as we can now judge, to a hermit who, having run through the varied experiences of life, and seen what there was to be seen of our continent and climate, from the sea-coast to the Mississippi, withdraws to the solitudes of the forests, where, in his hut, he tells to some adventurous boys the story of his career. He was to do duty, we conjecture, as Wordsworth's peddler does in "The Excursion,"—that is, he was to serve as the lay figure on which the poet was going to hang his fine descriptions of nature. Nothing more, however, came of this scheme than of the others, unless we are permitted to suppose that "The Fountain," the "Evening Reverie," "Noon," and one or two more of his pieces in blank verse, were parts of this projected whole. It would have been very easy to connect these pieces together, by some little story of this kind; but we are not sure that the readers of poetry would have been the gainers. "The Excursion" is not now read as a whole, only in its episodes, and the narrative which is meant to give it unity only gives it length and heaviness.

THE BLACK BEAR.

THE black bear (*Ursus Americanus*) derives its name from its fur, which is a rich, warm, and extremely glossy jet black, except on the muzzle, where, beginning at the mouth, the hair is a fawn color, which deepens into the dark tan color of the face, and ends in rounded spots over each eye. These color-marks and its peculiarly convex facial outline are the distinguishing marks of the species. The tan color becomes, with age, a brownish gray. The largest black bear I ever saw weighed five hundred and twenty-three pounds, and measured six feet and four inches from the tip of the nose to the root of the tail. One of this species seems to possess the power of transforming himself at will into a variety of

shapes. When stretched out at length he appears very long; when in good condition, short and stout; when upright, tall; and when asleep, he looks like a ball of glossy black fur. The black bear of to-day may be termed omnivorous, inasmuch as fish, flesh, fowl, vegetables, fruit, and insects are all eagerly devoured by him. He mates in October, and the period of gestation lasts one hundred and twenty days. Two to four cubs form a litter. The cubs are always jet black, and not ash color, as some of the older naturalists affirm. If, according to Flourens, the natural life of an animal be five times the period of its growth to maturity, I should think that the black bear's limit was about twenty years. I knew of a

cub which increased in size until his fourth year, when he appeared to have arrived at maturity.

Many country people and some experienced hunters have seen, as they believe, another species of the black bear, which they name a ranger, or racer. He is described as being a longer, taller, and thinner animal than the black bear proper, extremely savage, and distinguished by a white star or crescent on his breast. Marvelous tales are related of his ruthless doings, and any act of more than ordinary ferocity and daring, such as the wanton destruction of a large number of sheep, in daylight, in sight of the farm-house, is always attributed to a ranger. It is also said of him that he never hibernates, but prowls about all winter, seeking what he may devour, and keeping the farmers constantly on the alert to protect their stock. I have never had sufficient proof to warrant belief in the existence of a ranger bear, but have occasionally met with specimens of the black bear answering in some points to the above description. For instance, I have seen several black bears with white crescents on their breasts. The truth probably is that at times, during mild winters, a stray black bear may be seen prowling about when, in accordance with all accepted ideas on the subject, he should be fast asleep. This probable fact, and the variation in size and form common to all animals, no doubt account for the popular belief in the existence of the ranger bear.

The time when the black bear selects the den in which his long winter nap is taken depends on the openness or severity of the season. In any season he is seldom met abroad after the first of December, and is not seen again until the first warm days of March. He does not seem particular as to the character of his den, provided it shields him from the inclemency of the weather. A retreat dug by his powerful claws under the roots of a windfall, a rocky cave on the hill-side, or a hollow log, if he can find one large enough to admit him, will serve for a winter home. When he is ready to hibernate he is in fine condition and his fur is at its best. It is at this season that the hunters redouble their efforts to capture him. When he comes out in the spring he is in a sorry condition, and is seldom molested unless he makes himself troublesome to farmers. Numerous, and curious beyond belief, have been the theories and explanations offered by naturalists to account for the suspension of the functions of nature during hibernation. An Indian whom I have found to be trustworthy has often called my attention to fir-trees which had been freshly

stripped of their bark, to a distance of five or six feet from the ground, and has told me that it was the work of bears that were after the balsam, large quantities of which, according to the Indian, they eat every autumn before going into their dens. It was his theory that the balsam prevented bodily waste, and that when the bears came out in the spring they dug up and ate large quantities of a root which had the effect of restoring bodily functions that had been suspended during the period of hibernation. The den is sometimes revealed by a small opening over his place of concealment, where the snow has been melted by his breath. When efforts are made to dislodge him by making a fire of boughs and moss at the entrance to his den, he will attempt to trample the fire out, and often succeeds. He has, however, a natural dread of fire, and at the first signs of a forest-fire becomes greatly alarmed, and flies to the open clearings and road-ways. I once passed on horseback through a forest-fire which was burning on each side of the road, and most of the distance I was accompanied by a big black bear, which was following that avenue of escape.

It would seem improbable that the young of the black bear were liable to fall a prey to the fox and black cat, or fisher, yet such is the fact. This happens, of course, when the cubs are very young, and incapable of following their dam in her search for food. The black cat is the most successful cub-slayer. The fox, notwithstanding his proverbial sagacity, is often surprised by the return of the bear, and killed before he can escape from the den. An Indian hunter, who knew of two litters of cubs which he intended to capture as soon as they were old enough to be taken from their dam, was anticipated in one case by a black cat, and in the other by a fox. The latter paid the penalty of his adventure with his life, and was found in the den literally torn into shreds by the furious bear. The fox had killed one of the cubs, and the old bear, hoping to find a more secure place, had gone off with the two remaining cubs. The Indian overtook and slew her, and captured the cubs. Upon another occasion, he was not so fortunate. Stimulated by the large price offered by the officers of a garrison town for a pair of live cubs, he was indefatigable in his endeavors to find a den. One day, when accompanied by his little son, a boy of ten, he discovered unmistakable traces of a bear's den, near the top of a hill strewn with granite bowlders, and almost impassable from the number of fallen pines. One old pine had fallen uphill, and its up-reared roots, with the soil clinging to them,

formed, with a very large rock, a triangular space into which the snow had drifted to a depth of ten or twelve feet. The Indian was about to pass on, when he detected the whining of bear-cubs. By making a *détour*, he reached a place on a level with the bottom of the boulder, and there saw the tracks of an old bear, leading directly into the center of the space between the tree-root and the boulder. The old bear, in her comings and goings, had tunneled a passage under the snow-drift. Getting down on his hands and knees, the Indian, with his knife held between his teeth, crept, bear fashion, into the tunnel. After entering several feet, he found the usual bear device—a path branching off in two directions. While pondering what to do under such circumstances, a warning cry came from his little son, who was perched on the top of the boulder, and the next instant the old bear rushed into the tunnel, and came into violent contact with the Indian, the shock causing the tunnel to cave in. The Indian, after dealing the bear one blow, lost his knife in the snow, and seized the bear with his hands; but she proved too strong for him, and was the first to struggle out of the drift, when, unfortunately, she met the little Indian boy, who had climbed down to his father's rescue. He received a tremendous blow on the thigh from the bear's paw as she passed, which crippled him for life. Four days afterward the Indian, determined to avenge the injury of his son by slaying the old bear, returned to the den, and discovered her lying dead upon the snow in front of the boulder: his one blow had gone home, and the poor creature had crawled back to her young to die. The Indian dug away the snow, and found three cubs; one was dead, and the others died before he could reach his camp.

The principal strongholds of the black bear at the present day are the great forests of Maine and New Brunswick. My own observation and the reports of farmers lead me to think that Bruin is growing more carnivorous and discontented with a diet of herbs. Assuredly, he is growing bolder. He is also developing a propensity to destroy more than he can eat, and it is not improbable that his posterity may cease to be frugi-carnivorous. It is fortunate that an animal of the strength and ferocity which he displays when aroused, seldom attacks man. The formation of his powerful jaws and terrible canine teeth are well adapted to seize and hold his prey, and his molars are strong enough to crush the bones of an ox. His great strength, however, lies in his fore-arm and paws. His mode of attacking his prey is not to seize it

with his teeth, but to strike terrific blows with his fore-paw.

Bruin's weakness is for pork, and to obtain it he will run any risk. When the farmers, after suffering severe losses at his hands, become unusually alert, he retires to the depths of the forest and solaces himself with a young moose, caribou, or deer. He seldom or never attacks a full-grown moose, but traces of desperate encounters, in which the cow-moose has battled for her offspring, are frequently met with in the woods. The average value of a bear, including the bounty, is twenty dollars. This being the case, it may appear surprising that larger numbers are not taken. But the black bear combines extreme cunning with great sagacity, and every year he seems to be getting more on his guard, and suspicious of all devices intended for his capture. Large, full-grown animals are seldom killed. A black bear skin, taken at the proper season, is not excelled by any other kind of fur. If properly dressed, it possesses great softness and a gloss peculiar to itself. The fur is highly esteemed in Europe, where it is used for sleigh and carriage robes, and coat linings and trimmings. It is also in much request in England and other parts of Europe, for the shakos of certain infantry regiments and the housings and trappings of cavalry.

In the autumn of 1879, in the Red Rock district, Province of New Brunswick, eighteen bears were killed, only two of which had arrived at maturity; some of them were only yearlings. Only ten or twelve settlers and their families inhabit the district, and during that year seventy-three head of stock, including sheep, hogs, and horned cattle, were destroyed by bears. This district, situated on the extreme outskirts of civilization, is the bear's paradise. The houses in most cases are built of logs, and the occupants are a stalwart, simple race, whose manners and customs carry you back to the frontier life of half a century ago. They are hospitable to a degree not often met with at the present day. The farms on which they live are clearings in the primeval forests. During a visit to this district, I had the luck, unexpectedly, to see Bruin at home in one of his wildest retreats. North of the settlement a range of rocky hills rises perpendicularly from the shores of a forest lake. The hills are strewn with gigantic boulders, over which the hunter must pick his way with no little difficulty and danger. But by that expert climber, the black bear, such rugged ground is easily traversed. Our tramp had been a long one, and on our return my Indian guide proposed that we should cross the Red Rock hills, and thus save much time. Disregarding the old adage that "the longest way

HEAD OF *URSUS AMERICANUS*.

round is the shortest way home," I was deluded into following the guide's advice. Great black clouds threatened an autumn storm. After much hard climbing, we reached a place where the whole hill-side seemed riven apart. On every side we were surrounded by precipices and deep gulches, partly filled with great boulders and sharp fragments of rocks. Although the dangers were not of Alpine magnitude, they might just as well have been, inasmuch as they were greater than we had any means of overcoming. In attempting to find a way out, we clambered along a ledge of rocks that afforded only insecure footing, and gradually diminished in width until all farther progress in that direction became impracticable. Retracing our steps, almost in despair of finding an outlet, we came to a fissure in the cliff just wide enough to admit one at a time. For a distance of twenty feet we were able to walk in an upright position; then the pass-

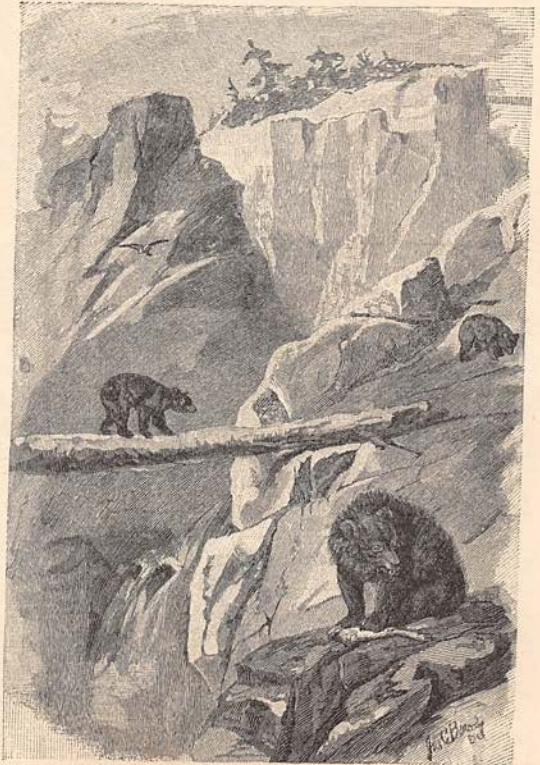
age narrowed rapidly, and we had to crawl upon our hands and knees in almost perfect darkness. Presently we came to a place where the opening was so low that, if one attempted to straighten up, his back came in contact with a solid wall of rock; thence the passage took a sharp downward pitch, at the bottom of which we found a space sufficiently large to permit us to regain an upright position. The darkness was now complete, and, not daring to move for fear of getting a fall, I thought it prudent to return to the ledge, and imparted my intention to the guide. I received no reply, and called out in a louder voice. To my surprise, the answer came in a muffled tone from a locality apparently directly under me. By this time, my eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and I detected a bluish, glimmering light on the rocky wall overhead, proceeding from a distant corner of the space in which I stood. Creeping to the source of the light, I found a wedge-like opening, decreasing



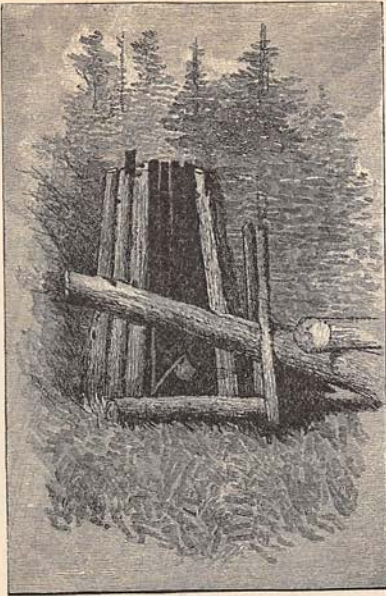
INDIAN HUNTER WAITING FOR A BEAR.

in width as it descended. While debating with myself what to do next, the guide's head appeared at the bottom of the opening. He called to me to come down. Entering in a recumbent position, feet foremost, I slipped down and discovered that the passage led into another chamber-like space, with the difference that it was in open daylight, the sky being visible beyond an overhanging ledge of rocks. The rocky platform was strewn with bones, and plentifully sprinkled with porcupine quills. The information of the guide was not needed to convince me that we were in the ante-chamber of a bear's den, and that the room above was the den proper. It seems almost incredible that the black bear should permit such an offensive animal as the porcupine to occupy the same den with him, but there is good reason to believe that he sometimes does so. Although it was too early in the season for Bruin to seek permanent winter quarters, I did not feel at all certain that he might not pay occasional visits to his den, and urged the guide to get out of the place as soon as possible. As there was likely to be more than one entrance to the den, we looked about us

and discovered that, by climbing over a jutting ledge of rock, we should be able to get upon a lower and much more extensive plateau of rock immediately under the den. We reached the platform safely, and, selecting a spot where we were sheltered and concealed by bowlders, we called a halt, and lighted our pipes. A slight tap on the shoulder caused me to turn around, and, looking in the direction indicated by the guide, I saw a large bear seated on his haunches and looking intently at something. Farther away I saw another bear, crossing a chasm on an old pine-log that bridged it, and that afterward helped us out of our dilemma. Another tap on the shoulder, and another surprise in store for me. For up the hill-side, above the den, sat another bear with his head partly turned to one side, and looking in an inquiring manner at the two bears below him. By this time the one on the log had nearly crossed over, and the one sitting on his haunches growled frightfully. We were not fifty yards from him, and he might at any moment detect our presence; fortunately, we were well to leeward of him. We had been exploring a stream, connecting a string of lakes, to examine a very extensive and perfect beaver-dam, and, not expecting to hunt, had left our rifles at the camp.



THE BEAR PASS.

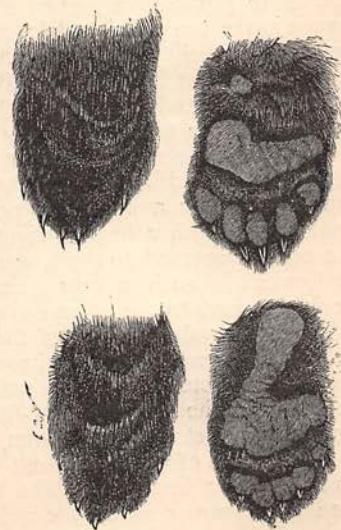
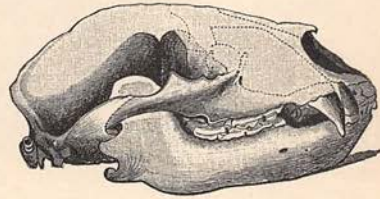


A DEAD-FALL TRAP.

All I had to fight with was a solid sketch-book, while, by some strange fatality, the Indian had even lost his knife out of its sheath in our climb. I was looking about for some way of escape, when I noticed that the bear on the hill-side had vanished, and the one that crossed over on the log had moved toward the one sitting on his haunches. They sat about ten feet apart, and made the strangest noise I ever heard. Commencing with the sniff peculiar to the bear, the noise was prolonged into a deep, guttural growl, accompanied by a peculiar champing of the jaws. At that moment, a large stone, evidently dislodged by the bear that had vanished from the hill-side, came tumbling down the ravine. It struck on the solid ledge on which we were crouching, and broke into pieces. Instinctively looking up, in apprehension that the fragment might be the advance guard of an avalanche, we lost sight of the two bears, and never saw them again. Alarmed by the falling stone, they had swiftly and stealthily gone away. The guide said that the two bears which were on the ledge with us were males, and that, as it was the pairing season, the growling we were treated to was merely the preliminary of a terrible fight. During the pairing season, the males congregate in bands and scour the forest, growling, snarling, and fighting. On such occasions, all prudent hunters avoid an encounter with them. The females are savage when suckling their young, and will fight to the death in their protection. At all other seasons both males and females avoid a meeting with

human beings, but if attacked and wounded, or brought to bay, the black bear is a foe to be dreaded. Their keen scent and acute hearing enable them to detect the approach of an enemy, and to keep out of his way.

Sometimes the black bear is hunted with dogs trained for the purpose. The dogs are not taught to seize the game, but to nip his heels, yelp round him, and retard his progress until the hunters come up and dispatch him with their rifles. Common yelping curs possessed of the requisite pluck are best adapted for the purpose. Large dogs with sufficient courage to seize a bear would have but a small chance with him, for he could disable them with one blow of his powerful paw. Another way of hunting is to track Bruin to his winter den, and either smoke or dig him out, when he may be dispatched by a blow on the head with the poll of an ax as he struggles out. Various kinds of traps, set-guns, and dead-falls are also employed against him. A very efficient means of capture is a steel trap, with double springs so powerful that a lever is necessary in setting it. The trap is placed in runs or pathways known to be frequented by bears, and concealed, care being taken not



SKULL, FORE AND HIND PAWS OF THE BLACK BEAR.

to handle the trap. A stout chain, with a grapnel or a large block of wood attached, is fastened to the trap. Even with this an old bear often manages to escape altogether, his sagacity teaching him to return and liberate the grapnel or block whenever it catches upon anything and checks him. He dies eventually, of course, if unable to free him-

reach it. The string has connection with a piece of wood which props up the dead-fall, consisting of a heavy log of beech or birch timber, weighted with other logs. When the bear pulls at the bait, the prop is drawn from under the heavy timber, which falls across his back. It sometimes happens that the hunter, to his discomfort, finds that his dead-



BEAR AND CUBS.

self from the trap, but in some cases he has been known to gnaw off a part of his paw and leave it in the trap. This mode of capture is open to the charge of cruelty, as the bear is usually caught by a paw, and sometimes by the snout, and the injury not being immediately fatal, the animal may die a lingering death of great agony. The set-gun, if properly arranged, kills the bear instantly. The gun is placed in a horizontal position, about on a level with a bear's height; one end of a cord is fastened to the trigger, and brought forward in such a way that when the bait is attached to the other end of the cord it hangs over the muzzle of the gun, and the least pull on the bait discharges the gun, which is protected from the weather by a screen of bark. The ordinary dead-fall consists of a number of stout poles driven in the ground in the form of a U. In front of the opening is placed a heavy log. The bait is suspended from a string within the inclosure, so that it will be necessary for the bear to place his fore legs over the log in order to

fall has proved fatal to one of his own or his neighbors' cattle.

In the autumn, bear-hunters take advantage of Bruin's known partiality for raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries, and set traps and dead-falls in the approaches to the patches. He also frequents the beech-forests, and his expertness as a climber enables him to obtain the rich mast on which he grows corpulent. In the spring, when he first comes from his winter quarters, he feasts upon the ants and grubs he discovers by industrious digging, or by turning over decayed logs. Later in the season, when the herrings and alewives run up the streams to spawn, Bruin turns fisherman, and captures the fish by intercepting them as they pass over shallow places, and scooping them out with his paws. His taste for pork and molasses often encourages him to visit the camps of lumbermen.

If captured when very young and carefully trained, the black bear becomes tame, but I doubt if he ought to be trusted as a pet. My own efforts to tame young bears have not



SACKING A LUMBER CAMP.

always proved successful. It is unpleasant, on returning from a journey, to find your house surrounded by the neighbors armed with old muskets and pitchforks, the windows broken, the gardens trodden down, your family imprisoned in the dining-room, and to be told by your man-servant, who has prudently kept outside of the house, that the pet bear, in a state of ferocity, is in possession. Nevertheless, if one is willing to endure that sort of thing, a vast amount of amusement can be got out of a tame bear.

I really think that Bruin possesses the sense of humor; at all events his actions point that way, and there is no doubt that he is extremely cunning and observing. I once had an English friend visiting me, who played the flute. He was in the habit of marching up and down, while playing, near a tame bear I had at the time. The bear had a piece of stick about two feet long, which he tossed about for amusement. After a time, he came to handle the stick very much as my friend did his flute. This annoyed my sensitive friend, and in revenge he teased the bear with uncouth noises. Bruin

sniffed and whined, and waited his opportunity for delivering a tremendous blow with his paw at his enemy, whose tall hat was knocked completely over his eyes. He escaped being scalped by dropping flat and rolling out of the reach of the bear. This bear spent much of his time in the tree to which he was chained, and when climbing usually got his chain twisted over and under the branches in a most intricate manner, but never failed to take out every turn as he descended. A friend who owned a tame bear told me that, for a long time, he could not account for the mysterious way in which the poultry disappeared. Observing, at different times, a good many feathers around Bruin's pole, he began to suspect that the bear was the culprit. Close watching confirmed his suspicions. When Bruin thought he was unobserved, he would seize any unfortunate hen or chicken within his reach and devour it; but if any one approached before he could complete the meal, he would sit upon his prey until the danger of discovery had passed. He was betrayed, at last, by the cackling of an old hen, that he had failed to silence.