

THE BROWN BEAR

(*Ursus Arctos*).



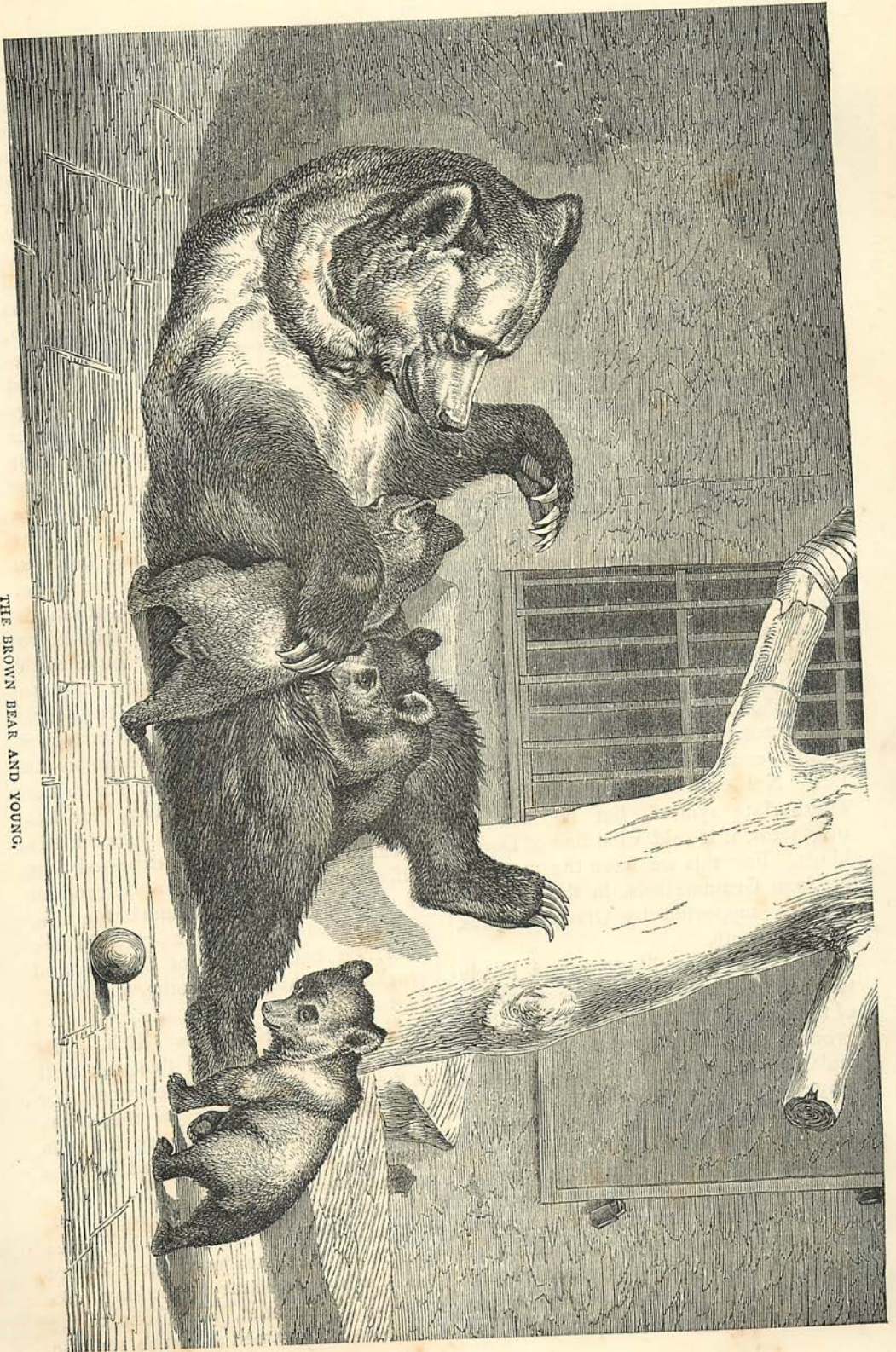
FEW animals are so universally distributed as the bear, or more frequently referred to in history, legend, or fable. With the exception of Africa and Australia, they are found throughout the world, adding terrors to Siberian wastes, Scandinavian forests, and Rocky Mountain recesses. Retreating from the encroachments of man, it is a rough index of civilisation to find them still inhabiting the fair lands under Turkish domination, while they have long been extinct in the more settled countries. In the infancy of history, the laughter-loving Greeks, looking upon the celestial space surrounding the polar star with awesome regard, called it the region of the bears, and its two principal constellations afterwards came to be called the great and little bears. The principal star in the great bear group was named by the Arabs *Dubhie* or *bear*; and it is a fact worthy of remark, recorded by historians, that the Iroquois tribe of Indians were found at the time of the discovery of North America to be familiar with the constellation of the Great Bear, which they called *Oquoari*, a word signifying *bear*. While the ancient historians often mention African bears—in the year B.C. 61, a hundred, each led by a negro hunter, being exhibited in the circus at Rome—yet the same luxurious and cruel Romans who set so high a value on British oysters, procured bears from Britain for purposes far other than merely to enhance a general's trophy. Martial speaks of the horrible torture to which the malefactor Laureolus was condemned—crucified alive, with his naked body to be

lacerated by an incensed British bear. Aristotle knew something about them. "The bear," says he, "is an omnivorous animal, and by the suppleness of its body climbs trees and eats the fruits, and also legumes. It also devours honey, having first broken up the hives; crabs, too, and ants it eats, and also preys upon flesh." The philosopher then describes how the animal attacks the stag, the boar, and even the bull. And a latter-day observer, less classical perhaps, testifies to the unchanging character of the bear's tastes and habits: "The bear is the knowingest varmint for finding out a bee-tree in the world. They'll gnaw for a day together at the trunk, till they make a hole big enough to get in their paws, and then they'll haul out honey, bees and all."

Bears were to be found in Britain long after the Romans retired. Ray quotes authority for the brown bear having been one of the Welsh beasts of chase, and Pennant adduces the places which retained the name of Pennarth, or the Bear's Head, as evidence that it existed in the Principality. In the "History of the Gordons," it is stated that one of that family, so late as the year 1057, was directed by the king to carry three bears' heads on his banner, as a reward for his valour in slaying a fierce bear in Scotland.

For many years it has been swept away from our islands so completely, that we find it imported for baiting, a sport in which our nobility, as well as the commonalty of the olden time—nay, even royalty itself—delighted. A bear-bait was one of the recreations offered to Elizabeth at Kenilworth, and in the Earl of Northumberland's "Household Book" we read of twenty shillings for

THE BROWN BEAR AND YOUNG.



his bear-ward: "Item. My lorde usith and accustomyth to gyfe yerly when his lordshippe is at home, to his bar-ward, when he comyth to my lorde in Cristmas with his lordshippe's beests, for makyng of his lordshippe pastime, the said xij. days xxs." In Southwark there was a regular bear-garden that disputed popularity with the *Globe* and *Swan* theatres, on the same side of the water. Now, however, so much do tastes alter (in this instance certainly for the better), such barbarous sports are banished from the metropolis.

The firm support afforded by the large flat sole of the foot enables the bears to rear themselves with comparative facility on their hind feet, and this has been taken advantage of to teach the animal to dance in an erect position. The discipline put in force to produce the accomplishment, is said to be so severe that it is never forgotten.

It is only reasonable that an animal which has been exalted even among the stars should hold a distinguished position among those more or less brilliant human constellations—reigning dynasties. Not only is the bear Russia's appropriate symbol, but he was the originator, it is said, of a line of Danish kings. For this we have the authority of Saxo Grammaticus, in the eleventh century, supported by Olaus Magnus, in the fifteenth.

Near a certain village was a lovely spot, chosen by the younger members of the community for the general playground, where one day the lovely and amiable daughter of a rich peasant played with her companions. Whether the game had reached a point awakening jealousy or envious rivalry, or was still pursuing an innocent development, history or legend saith not; but joy was soon turned into mourning by the rough-and-ready attention of an uninvited guest. A bear, like his Syrian forbears who waited upon the scorers of the prophet, rushed out of the neighbouring

forest, and suddenly seizing the guileless fair one in his fore-paws, hurried away with her to its den in the gloomy recesses of the wood. But as one evil deed is but the seedling of many, so the bear having lost his first state of innocency, turned a most notorious and peculiar thief. Game and fruit disappeared mysteriously, and at last no herd was safe from the abduction of cattle, which, unlike the other commodities, he required for *his own* use. The bear had now overshot the mark; and the indignant populace, who, perhaps, had never quite forgiven him for carrying off their most beautiful and amiable young woman, and who had certainly been annoyed at the loss of game and fruit, now collected and gave chase, and between them ended the destroyer's existence. But, wonder of wonders, the peasant's daughter was found again, and, more marvellous still, soon after gave birth to a son, who from the most intimate domestic reason was called Bjorn (Bear). Stronger in body and mind than other men, he grew up a living testimony to the reputation his forefathers (or rather forbears) had earned: "The bear has twelve men's wit, and six men's strength." It was to be expected that Ulf, the bear's grandson, a descendant of such a gifted and remarkable sire, should attain some high rank in the land; he became Jarl of Scania, and graciously asking the brother's consent, he took to wife Estrid, sister to the Danish king, Knut the Rich. His sagacity saved the royal fleet, as well as the king himself, from destruction or capture by [the enemy; yet there was always a lack of cordiality between them, which came to a head over a game of chess.

So great was the king's rage that, though Ulf fled to sanctuary in Lucius church, he was murdered there before the altar by an emissary of the king. According to Pennant, Ulva, one of the Hebrides, was named after this son of a

bear. But no good came to the royal murderer of this action, for Swen the son of his victim succeeded to the Danish throne after the death of Knut the Rich. But some irreverent people insinuate that this ancestor of a dynasty was a robber in bear skin.

The Laplanders hold the bear in great reverence, calling him "the Dog of God," avoiding, however, any irreverent use of that appellation, lest it should avenge itself on their flocks. Reverenced in life, he is utilised after death. What the cow is to us, so is the brown bear to these northern wanderers. He seems to give them the necessaries and even the comforts of life. The skin forms their beds and their coverlets, bonnets for their heads, gloves for their hands, and collars for their dogs, while an overall made of it, and drawn over the soles of their shoes, prevents them from slipping on the ice. The flesh and fat are their dainties. Of the intestines they make masks or covers for their faces, to protect them from the glare of the sun in the spring, and use them as a substitute for glass, by extending them over their windows. Even the shoulder-blades are said to be put in requisition for cutting grass.

The reverence of northern people for the bear is a great bar to the acquisition of facts connected with the living animal. The Lapps observe many superstitious ceremonies at the death of "the old man with the fur cloak," as they call him, with awe, begging his pardon for taking his life, and thus putting his inner self to the inconvenience of summary transmigration. In certain districts the knowledge is said to be yet retained of the olden sagas that could transform human beings into wolves and bears, though they are obliged to retake the human form at the "witching hour" till cock-crow. The Norwegians share a little of the Lapp respect for the bear, calling him by some such title as "grandfather," or "twelve-men-strong."

Unwieldy as seems the brown bear, and habitually avoiding human beings, yet, when roused on behalf of itself or offspring, it is terrible to face. So quick and unexpected are its movements that it will baffle the aim of any but an experienced huntsman; while when wounded anywhere but in heart or brain its tenacity of life enables it to fight with seemingly increasing energy, and many a hunter has received a mortal wound by incautiously approaching an apparently dead carcass. It displays wonderful dexterity in warding off and aiming blows, and if a chance occurs, it will seize its adversary round the body, and seek to overcome the enemy by squeezing out his life. With terrible cunning it will aim its tremendous blows upon the head of the hunter, and fearful is the effect of one, so powerful is the limb independently of the long sharp claws. A single blow will entirely scalp the head; but, strange to say, the bear having stunned his victim, will use his paws no longer, but only the teeth, biting him here and there, and if under the awful circumstances the wounded man can sham death, the bear will most probably leave him.

But bears are naturally very playful, and many droll stories are told of tamed specimens, and, what is more remarkable, of wild ones who have been said to be discovered playing with children, submitting graciously to their unceremonious liveliness, and quietly leaving them when adults appear on the scene.

The most curious provision of nature in regard to bears is perhaps to be found in their habit of hibernation. It is believed by Scandinavian peasants that they make two days' trial of their retreat before finally deciding upon it. With most scrupulous care they prepare their soft and warm bed, thickly covering the floor with dried leaves and young twigs of pine. At the end of his five months' sleep the bear is as fat

as ever; and experienced hunters sometimes have to disturb it rather roughly in its heavy sleep before it will move sufficiently to present a vital part to their rifle. It is perhaps owing to being occasionally disturbed in his winter sleep that some report him as being out of condition when the spring returns. The Norwegians say that he and the weather turn themselves on the other side on January 12th, mid-winter day.

The brown bear will grow to six feet or more in length, and three feet in height, and shares with his foreign relations a most accommodating appetite—grass, berries, tender shoots of shrubs, ants, honeycomb, and larva—and though able to thrive as a strict vegetarian, once having tasted blood, he will risk his life to gratify his carnivorous appetite, and doubtless knows where have gone a fair proportion of the six or seven thousand animals annually destroyed in Sweden alone. In a day and night a bear can eat the most of a young heifer. They are very agile, and remarkably strong, running quicker than a man, climbing trees with facility, swimming with speed, though the “fur-cloak” soon fatigues

them; one has been known, rearing upon his hind legs, to carry a man, whose toes only occasionally touched the ground, about 200 feet; while another carried in his fore-paws a horse (Norwegian, and, therefore, smaller than English) along a timber-log crossing a rushing stream.

In 1872, two bears came upon a grazing herd of cattle. They have been known to kill cattle by repeated blows upon the head; and mutilated cows have been found udderless by the milkmaid. As one was about to seize a heifer a little apart from the rest, a two years' ox suddenly charged him with an awful bellow, and with one thrust of the horn ripped him open from the stomach to the neck. A young herd-boy witnessing the occurrence, hastily collected and drove home the cattle. The dairymaid, arming herself with an axe and staff, accompanied the lad back to the scene of conflict, where they found the wounded bear lying dead, the other, after almost covering him with moss, having retired.

The dairymaid was soon the richer by the valiantly-won prize—a warm shaggy coat.

