

AN ADVENTURE WITH A GRIZZLY.



"ALKIN' of grizzlies, here's the track of one," said Tom Wilson, suddenly reining in his horse a short distance in advance of me. After a moment's examination of the huge impression, he continued: "It's a pretty fresh one, too; the feller can't be a great way off. This is just the kind of a place for 'em."

"Are there grizzlies in these mountains, Tom?" asked I, doubtingly.

"Yes, sir; the fust one I ever seed was in this very range, and he jest about scart me to death, that's sartin," replied Tom.

"That'll be a good story for this evening, Tom, after we get into camp," said I, regarding the great track with no little curiosity, for I was still in doubt about its being that of a grizzly. "Are you sure it isn't the track of a cinnamon bear?"

"Yes, sir. There's no mistakin' the prent of a grizzly's foot," replied Tom. "And here," continued he, as he followed the trail a short distance, "is where he sot down. I wouldn't think strange if we see one afore long; this is the sort of country they like."

"I wonder," said I, as we again mounted our horses,— "I wonder if these fellows are as savage as those found further north?"

"Well, b'ars is like men. Once in a while you run aginst a cross-grained, ugly feller that had rather fight than not; then you may look out for trouble. Ag'in, you find one that'll git out of the way if he can. I've seen a she b'ar desert her cubs and take to the woods; then, ag'in, I've seen them that would fight every inch of the ground for a mile afore they'd give up, and that, too, after

they'd got half-a-dozen balls in them. B'ars is sich curious critters, that I've very of'en thought that they had a heap of sense. If a b'ar's been travellin' ag'inst the wind, and wants to lie down, he alwuz turns in an opposite direction, and goes a long distance from his fust track afore he makes his bed; then he can scent a hunter if one gits on his trail, for b'ars have got mighty keen smellers. I once found a big grizzly in a cave in these very mountains, and built a fire inside the mouth of it to smoke him out; and I'll be blest if that 'ere b'ar didn't come out three times, and put the fire out with his paws, and then go back into the cave again. He didn't seem to mind my shootin' at him no more'n if the bullets had been peas. After awhile I killed him, and then I had the curiosity to see how many balls the old feller had in his carcass, and I'll be blest if I didn't find nine.

"I reckon we sha'n't find any better place to camp to-night than this 'ere. You see, there's plenty of wood, water, and grass—so we'll just stop here."

Dismounting from our animals, they were soon enjoying the luxuriant grass that grew around us, while Tom commenced preparations for our supper. In gathering the wood for his fire, his keen eye detected a herd of deer in the distance, and, seizing his rifle, he sallied out for one, leaving me alone to guard the camp.

During his absence, let me briefly tell you about Tom, and what we were doing in this wilderness.

It had long been a favourite theory of mine that the Sierra Madre range, which intersects the Territory of New Mexico, contained large deposits of silver and gold, as extensive as those found in Nevada on the north, or in

Mexico on the south; and the recent arrival at Santa Fé of a party of traders from the Navajoe country, with some very rich specimens of gold and silver ore, had so far confirmed my opinion, that I determined to spend a month in the mountains, prospecting for the precious metals.

Chance had thrown me in contact with this well-known scout and once Texan ranger, by name Tom Wilson, whom I had engaged to accompany me on the expedition. Tom was a true specimen of a frontiersman—"long, lank, and loose," he used to say, and certainly his appearance justified the description. Originally from Kentucky, he had emigrated to Texas when it was yet a republic; had taken part in its early struggle for independence, and when that was achieved had joined Jack Hayes' company of Rangers, with which he remained until his superior knowledge of woodcraft attracted the attention of Gen. Persifer F. Smith, at that time in command of the military department of Texas, who made him what he termed his "head-quarters' scout." After remaining with the General some years, he found his way up into New Mexico, where he had since been in the employ of Major-General Garland.

As he bore the reputation of being thoroughly acquainted with the country,—was brave, honest, and generous, as well as one of the most skilful trailers on the frontier,—I deemed myself particularly fortunate in securing him for a guide and travelling companion.

At the time my story opens we had been five days on the road, and were fast approaching the very heart of the Navajoe country.

After an absence of about half-an-hour, Tom appeared staggering under the weight of a fine fat doe, which was soon dressed, and a portion of it broiling over the coals for our supper. This over, we threw ourselves upon our blankets, and, while enjoying the cheerful light of our

camp fire, Tom related his experience with the first grizzly he ever saw.

"You see, when I first came up to this country, I didn't know much about it; but General Garland allowed I was the man he wanted to scout for him, and so I entered his service. When he was a-travellin' over the country, I used to make it a p'int to look round considerable when in camp, so as to get acquainted with it like, because in my business a feller had to know it pretty middling well.

"I'd heerd a good deal about grizzlies, though I'd never seed one, for they don't have 'em up in Kentuck', where I come from, or in Texas either; but when I heerd old trappers talkin' about 'em, and tellin' how savage and strong they was, I always allowed that there warn't no kind of a b'ar that I was afeerd of, and I didn't know there was either. You see, I didn't let 'em know that I'd never'd seed one of the critters, for I made up my mind that if ever I come across one, I'd have a tussle with him, and he shouldn't get away from me neither, though I must confess that I felt a little skeery of a critter that could crunch a man or kill a buffalo as easy as I could break an egg. Still, I talked big, 'cause talk is cheap, you know.

"Well, one day we was to the north of this,—camped on the San Juan River. The valley was eight or ten miles long, and perhaps a couple wide, with the biggest oak-trees growin' in it that I ever seed growin' anywhere; some of 'em would measure twenty feet round the butts, and the General said he reckoned they was more'n a hundred years old.

"I got tired of stayin' round camp and doin' nothin'; so I walked down to where the animals was feedin' and talked to the herder awhile, and then went on down the valley, lookin' at the rocks and mountains and trees, till I got a long ways from camp, and calculated it would take me a good hour to git back. After

startin' on the back trail, I happened to notice one tree, which stood a little to one side of my track, that looked so much larger than the others, that the idea came into my head to just examine it. I had a stout oak stick in my hand, and as I came up to the tree I hit the trunk two or three blows, to see if it was sound, you know. Then I thought I'd see how big round it was, so that I could tell the General how many steps it took to circumnavigate it. So I stuck my stick in the ground for a mark, and started.

"When I got about half-way round, I happened to look up, and I'll be blest if there wasn't a grizzly as big as an ox, within two feet of me, a-settin' on his haunches, and watchin' me out of a hole in the stump of that tree.

"I brought up pretty sudden, I tell you, and took one good look at him. He looked meek enough at first glance, but in a jiffy he fixed his eyes on me, and his great mouth, which was half-open, with his white teeth, looked water-ish like, as though it was just achin' to git hold of me. I see him kind er half raise one of his big paws, and then I started. I heerd him give a low, wheezy kind er growl, as he started after me, and I didn't wait to hear any more. If ever a feller run, that feller was Tom Wilson.

"I reckon I thought of every story I'd ever heerd about grizzlies; how savage they was; how they could beat a hoss runnin' any time. The more I thought, the faster I run, and the plainer I could hear the b'ar a-comin' after me.

"I declare I never knowed it was in me to run so. I throwed off pretty nigh all the clothes I had on, and was doin' jest my level best, when suddenly I tripped on somethin' or other, and went down. Then I knowed 't was all up with me for sartin, and I expected every minute to feel that b'ar's paw on to me.

"I remembered how I'd heerd Nat Beal say, that it a grizzly thought a man

was dead, he'd dig a hole and bury him, without hurtin' him any, and after a day or two would come back and dig him up. So I laid still and held my breath, waitin' for the b'ar to bury me.

"I could hear him diggin' the hole, and, though my eyes was shet, I could see jest how he looked, as he handled them paws of his.

"It seemed to me that I laid there and held my breath for nigh an hour, expecting every minute to have the b'ar roll me into the hole. After awhile I ventured to peek out, and, would you believe it, there wa'nt no b'ar there!

"I jest picked myself up mighty sudden, and made tracks for camp, and I reckon if ever a feller felt beat that feller was me, then and there.

"It was a long time before I said anything about my scare in camp; but, at last, I told the General, and I thought he'd split a-laughin'."

"Well, Tom," said I, "you must have been pretty badly frightened."

"Frightened! I jest tell you, sir, I was the worst scart man this side of the San Juan, and I didn't git over it neither in a hurry, sure's you're born."

"What had become of the bear?" asked I.

"Why, you see, he was asleep in that hole, and when I thumped on the tree with my stick it woke him up. As a nat'ral consequence, his curiosity was riz, and he poked his head out to see what was a-knockin'; but," added Tom, with a laugh, "before he could say 'Come in,' I was gone. I've always owed grizzlies a grudge since that scare."

"Well, Tom," said I, "that's a pretty good story, and I don't blame you for running. I'll now fill my pipe and have a smoke before retiring. Will it be necessary to keep guard to-night?"

"No, I reckon not," replied Tom; "we haint seen no trail for two days, nor any patches of corn, and I don't believe the Indians come into this region very often. Anyway, we'll risk it to-night," with

which remark he went out to take a last look at the animals before retiring, and upon his return spread his blankets a little distance from the fire, and was soon fast asleep.

Not feeling in a mood for sleeping, I replenished the fire, and sat smoking my pipe and laughing to myself at the ridiculous figure Tom must have cut, running over the prairie with nothing in pursuit; until, some hours later, a growing feeling of drowsiness warned me that it was time to spread my own blankets, which I did, and soon fell asleep.

How long I slept I do not know; but I was roused by a vague impression that something was wrong about the camp. Half awake, I turned over, and, opening my eyes, fancied that I could discover in the darkness the faint outlines of an animal, which I supposed to be one of the mules; so once more dropped to sleep.

In a short time I again woke, and this time saw two eyes angrily glaring at me in the darkness. I sprang into a sitting posture; but as I did not then see them, supposed that I had been dreaming, and that the fiery eyes were the natural result of Tom's story.

The fire had burned low; occasionally a half-consumed brand would flare for an instant into a bright flame, casting a ruddy glow upon all things around, and then suddenly die out, leaving the darkness more intense, the gloom more profound, than before. By straining my eyes, however, I detected the outline of a huge form in the dim light that I was confident could be no mule.

Springing to my feet, I called loudly for Tom, at the same time trying to get hold of either my revolver or rifle, which, in my confusion, I failed to find. While hunting for them, my hand encountered a miner's pick, and, grasping it, I turned to find Tom at my side, and a huge grizzly standing upon his hind legs within six feet of us.

As he slowly waddled towards us, the

light from the dying embers of the fire revealed his open mouth, gleaming white teeth, and huge paws, extended as if to embrace us both in one grasp, while his eyes shone like balls of fire.

Terrified as I was, I had presence of mind enough to raise the pick, and, just as Tom fired, I brought it down; but, with a hoarse, angry growl, the bear struck it a blow with one of his huge paws, with as much ease as a boy would bat his ball, which sent it spinning from my hand. He was within two feet of us when Tom again fired. This time the ball struck a vital spot, and the huge monster, with a howl of rage and defiance, reeled for a moment, and then rolled over on his side, dead.

Up to this time neither of us had spoken; but now the silence was broken by Tom, who exclaimed: "That was an ugly customer; let's start up the fire, and see what he looks like."

But I was in no condition to start up the fire, for as soon as the terrible excitement was over, the reaction came, and I sank to the ground trembling.

I soon recovered, and, by the time Tom had a bright fire burning, was ready to examine the bear. As he lay stretched out before us, he was a monster indeed. His shaggy dun coat was thickly flecked with patches of grey, and his huge jaws made me fairly shudder when I reflected what a narrow escape we had had from his embrace.

Daylight revealed the unwelcome fact that the creature had attacked and killed one of our mules during the night, dragging the carcass some distance from the spot where he had been picketed.

The bear measured nearly seven feet in length, and six feet one inch in girth. We greatly regretted, the loss of our mule, for it prevented our taking with us the much desired skin of the grizzly as a trophy. The experience, however, taught us a lesson, and we never afterwards failed to mount guard while travelling through the Sierra Madre country.