

MR. PERKER'S BEAR; OR, MR. BEAR'S PERKER?

BY PRESIDENT BATES.

SINCE his marriage with Effie Cameron, Mr. Perker has greatly improved in many respects. In his attire, his wheel, and his general style, Mr. Perker still retains his proud pre-eminence as the pink of fashion of the club. Taken all in all, he is the naggiest wheelman that ever sat on a saddle. But now it is a chastened and refined glory. The little "loudness," indicative of an ambition soaring after effects not quite attainable, which formerly marred Mr. Perker's brilliancy at times, has given place to a subdued chasteness, suggesting that he could be still more elegant if a rival should appear. Plainly he exhibits evidences of being toned by feminine taste.

Mr. Perker still clings fondly to his bicycle gun, but nowadays he keeps it in the barn. Mrs. Effie will not permit it to be brought into the house. I mention this for the tranquilization of visiting wheelmen, so that they need not hesitate to accept an invitation to one of the elegant lunches with which Mrs. Effie is wont to regale the club and its guests on occasions. And pilgrim wheelmen, who have read *OUTING* in former years, do not need to be assured that Mrs. Effie Perker is an altogether charming hostess, and one of the prettiest and most warm-hearted Scotch-women that ever made a home happy.

Former readers of *OUTING* also know that Mr. Perker's remarkable dog, Smart, gave promise in his puppyhood of becoming one of the most intelligent animals in the country. In fact, he achieved wide notoriety in his early career. He is now famous for sagacity and accumulated wisdom. As a bicycle hunting dog he is not only peerless, but the founder of a new race-bicycle hunting dogs—a species of dog not hitherto known; and several clubs have obtained specimens of his progeny.

When Mr. Perker was required by the firm to whose interests he devotes his talents to visit a settlement upon the northern coast of Lake Michigan, upon business that would occupy him for two or three weeks, he determined to take with him his dog, his bicycle gun and his wheel. Mrs. Perker protested mildly; but yielded sweetly upon hearing Mr. Perker's solemn promise not to hunt wildcats. For a

woman whose girlhood was spent in the frontier wilds of Canada, Mrs. Perker entertains a singular apprehension of wildcats—all on Mr. Perker's account. Of course, he is a hero in her wifely estimation; but she does not consider him a wildcat hero. And she has very little faith in Mr. Perker's bicycle gun, or in the tried courage and sagacity of Mr. Perker's dog Smart, as against wildcats. She mingled with the packing of Mr. Perker's clean linen a loving remonstrance against hunting wildcats; and she mixed with Mr. Perker's toothbrush and razor a tender warning against being led by "that fool, Smart," into danger. Mr. Perker solemnly promised, with his parting kiss, to take good care of himself. And he meant it.

When Mr. Perker left the city, in Southern Michigan, the spring was well advanced. The roads had dried and were ridable, while the trees were beginning to show yellow-green buds. When, however, he arrived in the Northern woods, the snow still lingered in patches in the dim shades of the pine and hemlock forests, and ice clung to the shores of the lake. The rivers and brooks had cleared themselves, but were still in spring flood. The sharp frosts at night were followed by warm, sunny days, and occasionally by a day that remained cold enough not to melt the surface frost. There was no chance to ride except along the lake shore, where the sloping sands had frozen smoothly and were firm when their surface was unmelted. At various distances from the shore, generally ten to thirty rods, ice-banks, in some places twenty feet high, had formed in the shoal water, from great fields of drifting ice being driven upon the coast by the winter gales, and breaking and piling up their shore edges. Between the ice-banks and the shore sands the ice was reasonably flat, with a top surface of roughly frozen snow. Wherever a swollen river discharged into the lake, its freshet had cut an open channel through the flat ice and through the ice-banks, though the ice-banks still furnished bridges by which to cross the channels of the smaller streams.

At that season of the year there was little hunting, for most game was protected by the game-laws. To be sure the open

spaces of water were visited by flocks of wild fowl flying northward, and there were rabbits in the woods, and of them Mr. Perker bagged a few. But, as of old, his hunter's soul longed for larger game, and only his solemn promise to Effie prevented his joining the settlers in their wildcat hunting. There were wolves in the woods—large gray wolves. But it requires good hunting to get sight of one of these wary prowlers; and Mr. Perker had not the time to take long tramps into the swamps where they kept their lairs. The bears had also come out from their winter sleep, and almost every day Mr. Perker heard of their slaughter. But bears require skilled hunting, unless one happens upon a specimen by accident. If there was any one thing more than another that Mr. Perker longed for it was a bear. He ached for the glory of killing a bear. A bearskin, captured by his own hand, would elevate him several degrees in the estimation of the club and would greatly enhance the reputation of his bicycle gun. But the days of his sojourn in the wilderness were waning fast, and an encounter with a real live bear still remained the thing "he long had sought and mourned because he found it not," as the hymn-book feelingly remarks. What made his disappointment more bitter was the fact that everybody in the settlement freely conceded that Smart undoubtedly possessed all the faculties and qualities of a good bear dog, except that of finding a bear. Smart, with his master, had made the acquaintance of every dead bear brought into the settlement, but the live bears perversely avoided his distinguished society.

Bears have provokingly peculiar ways. When you arm yourself with rifle, axe, knife and dog, and go hunting expressly for bear society, every bear in the woods hangs out a sign, "not at home," and declines to be interviewed. When you particularly prefer not to be disturbed in your solitude, as your gun is at home, and you forgot to bring either axe or knife, and your dog is a mile off, rushing around after fugacious rabbits, then is the time that the largest and savagest, and most impudent of all bears is most apt to thrust himself upon your attention, with alarming indications of begging for a chew.

Mr. Perker had reached the last day of his stay in the settlement. It was a fine but cold Sunday. There was a moderate northwest wind swaying the dull evergreen tree-tops and ruffling the gray-blue waters

of the lake, but in the woods and along the shore, sheltered by the bordering pines and hemlocks, the air was still and just cool enough not to melt the surface of the frozen sand. Five miles up the shore lived a man with whom Mr. Perker had done business for the firm. Mr. Perker desired to call upon him once more, not really on business, but to show him attention and leave a good impression. This man had a thirteen-year-old boy who, during a visit to a city the previous summer, had seen cowboys perform in a circus, and this had fired his youthful spirit with ambition to lasso something. Mr. Perker thought to win the heart-and custom-of the father by making the boy a present of a lasso. To this end he bought a suitable rope, thirty-six feet long. On one end he had a sailor make a Turk's-head knot, to prevent its slipping through the grasp. On the other end was the lasso loop. But, lest the ambitious youth should accidentally strangle his younger brother, or his father's favorite calf or pig, the sailor put a knot in the rope so that the loop could close sufficiently to hold but not to choke. The rope was stretched and limbered with oil and wax, making it a very good lasso for a boy, and strong enough to hold a mule,

Mr. Perker would not go a-hunting on Sunday—he never did. There was, however, no service till evening, so he determined to ride along the beach on his wheel, make the visit, return in time for the service, and start far home on Monday morning. He coiled the lasso and tied it with a thread, so that he could easily carry it on the head of his wheel, and though he did not take his bicycle gun, Smart, of course, accompanied him. The beach sand proved hard and moderately smooth, so that the riding was fair. He was in good spirits, having succeeded well in his business, and at peace with the world, and had no thought of seeing game of any kind.

He had gone nearly half-way, and was riding quietly and comfortably along, minding his own business, when he was startled by seeing a large bear come out of the woods, ahead of him, and walk down to the shore, where it turned and went leisurely forward, evidently not having seen him.

Smart, as was his habit, was—very sagaciously—somewhere else when he was wanted to put himself in danger. If Smart had reasoned that he did not know that his master would meet a bear; but, in case his master should meet a bear, it would be a great deal safer for him to be absent, he

could not have acted with shrewder wisdom. At that moment he was a quarter of a mile behind in the woods, enjoying himself greatly, trying to ram himself down a woodchuck's hole, at the bottom of which, his wise nose informed him, a woodchuck either was or recently had been. He was sternly resolved to have that woodchuck out, if it took all day. So now and then he would pull out his head to bark, by way of signaling his master for help, and then ram it down the hole again, so that the woodchuck couldn't get out without running down his yawning throat.

In the absence of Smart, Mr. Perker conceived a brilliant scheme for the capture of the bear. He would lasso the beast, and then call Smart, whom he supposed to be somewhere close at hand. So breaking the thread that kept the coils of the rope together, he opened the loop, slipped the knotted end under his right thigh, and drew it around the saddle behind him, holding the knot in his left hand, and then pedaled rapidly toward the unconscious and innocent forest monarch, the rubber-tired wheel making no noise. As he was an excellent rider, he could have done this without using either hand; but he kept his left hand, with the knotted end of the lasso in it, upon the handle-bar.

He was almost upon the bear, stealing silently upon his prey, when the bear caught a glimpse of him over his shoulder. Instantly the bear wheeled about, reared upon his hind legs, exhibited a frightfully open countenance and spread claws, at least three inches long, in a way that betokened a warm welcome. At the same time every hair on the animal's body seemed to bristle with fury, and it snarled in a blood-curdling baritone voice, which would have made a fortune for an opera star villain.

Mr. Perker was not entirely prepared for this reception. It had not occurred to him that his advances toward a familiar acquaintance would be met in that way, He hastily concluded not to intrude. But not having his right hand upon the handle-bar, in a position to put down the break, it was a great deal easier to wish to stop than to accomplish it. Therefore, he simply stood on the pedals, and they pitched him headlong over the handles, right at the bear, like heaving a bag of bran off a wagon.

It was now the bear's turn to be astonished. He had not calculated upon any such method of assault. He was prepared for a fair fight; but he wasn't used to having men thrown at him, all doubled

up in a wad. "Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves shall never tremble." But *that* shape!—well, he was the scariest bear probably ever seen upon the coast of Lake Michigan. He was so scared that he didn't have presence of mind enough to run into the woods; but, with a loud snort of panic, he scattered the frozen sand straight down the beach.

In falling Mr. Perker somehow gave the lasso loop such a flirt that it went over the head of the bear and drew about his neck, when he started to run, Mr. Perker did not intend to do it, and the bear ought not to have laid it up against Mr. Perker. It was purely an accident—a liberty with a stranger that Mr. Perker would not have taken under such circumstances, if he could have helped it. In fact he couldn't have lassoed a bear by the neck if the bear hadn't been surprised by his header, for a bear on guard is as practiced a boxer as can be found, and one can no more get a noose about his neck than one can over a man's neck with his hands, and arms free to fend it off. As it was, however, the bear was caught; and, as he ran, the knot of the rope caught under the bicycle saddle, and that machine was dragged, rattling, bounding, banging and glittering after the flying brute, adding to his panic, like a tin-pan tied to a dog's tail.

Mr. Perker scrambled to his feet quicker than he ever did before in his life. His first instinctive impulse was to ascertain if he was still alive, with none of his members missing. Having discovered that he was all there, his next impulse was to run after his beloved wheel, which he did, shouting like a lunatic for "Smart! Smart!" This did not tend to lessen the fright, nor diminish the speed of the bear—quite the contrary.

About twenty rods ahead a small brook had cut a channel through the flat ice with its spring flood, but the ice-banks were still intact a dozen rods from the shore, compelling the outflowing flood to find a channel beneath them. When Mr. Perker first formed the scheme to lasso the bear he had counted upon this open water to stop the animal in case he ran that way. Now he expected the bear to either turn into the woods or else go around the open mouth of the brook on the ice-bank. But, as may be guessed, Mr. Perker was not familiar with bears. This bear, frightened half out of his wits by the bicycle clattering at his heels at the end of the rope, didn't turn at the brook. On the contrary he

plunged into it and swam across, no doubt with the notion that his mysterious pursuer could be stopped by the icy water. Clambering out on the ice on the opposite side, as soon as he got the length of the rope from the brink the bicycle caught under the ice and anchored him. This the more easily because the ice upon which he stood was glassy smooth from the recent overflow, and gave his claws no hold, let him strain, and yank, and dig in his toes and swear as savagely as he might.

Seeing this Mr. Perker hurried faster and shouted louder, doing his best to get around the end of the open channel by way of the ice-bank. He was afraid that the rope would break or be gnawed off and let his beloved wheel sink where the water was probably twenty feet deep. Coming around the head of the channel, he ran along the edge of the ice to get between the bear and the water, and haul up the bicycle. If he could recover his wheel he would be willing to let the bear go. Meanwhile he kept shouting for Smart. On his approach the bear redoubled his efforts to break away, but in vain. Mr. Perker reached the spot and managed to loosen his wheel from its hold under the ice by pulling on its handle-bar. It naturally came up out of the water with a jerk that upset Mr. Perker with great violence, jamming one of his feet between the spokes as he fell.

The bear now set off again, plunging and snarling, this time toward the woods, only a hundred feet away, dragging Mr. Perker by the foot, flat on his back. In hopes of stopping the procession, Mr. Perker flopped over upon his breast, and tried to dig his hands into the ice. No go. He only skinned his hands. As he struck the rougher ice it felt hot from friction, and he turned over again on his back. But it was equally hot that way. When he struck the sand, it seemed red-hot. It was like being drawn over a rasp. Luckily the sand was only a few feet wide, the woods coming down at this point almost to the shore. Here the bear turned slightly, and in a moment Mr. Perker's free leg went on one side of a small tree, while his caught leg went on the other side. The tree did not break nor his leg pull out by the roots, though Mr. Perker thought for a moment that it would, and the procession was anchored again. By way of backing the anchor Mr. Perker threw his arms about the tree and hugged it with all his might, while he yelled for Smart.

The frightened bear, after a few frantic tugs, became convinced that he could not get away. Then he turned upon the prostrate and yelling Perker with dire intent; but the instant the strain slackened on the rope, Mr. Perker was able to kick, and a single kick freed his caught foot. Before he could rise, however, the bear would have been upon him but for an interruption. That interruption was from Smart who came tearing around the ice-bank and charged bravely to the rescue of his imperiled master.

Finding that the woodchuck—if there was any woodchuck in the hole—evidently intended to stay there, Smart paused in the work of excavation, and sat down to reflect and catch his breath. The instant he was thus quiet he heard the far-off voice of his master calling him in a manner that indicated urgency. Smart ran after his master at full speed, and coming to the spot where Mr. Perker first encountered the bear, stopped as if he had run against something. His nose whispered "bear!" to his brain. The hair on his back bristled. Then he heard Perker shout, and set off on his track again. Coming around the open channel by way of the ice-bank he caught sight of the bear, and charged fiercely upon the unknown enemy, intending to incontinently scatter his vitals all over that part of the coast.

Attacked by the dog, the bear halted in his rush at Mr. Perker, sat up on his haunches, and bestowed a buffet upon poor Smart that rolled him over and over, a dozen feet away. Smart, though a remarkably intelligent dog, did not know much about bears; but that single cuff taught him much. He caught the general idea immediately, and rushed behind Mr. Perker for protection, while the bear rushed after him. Mr. Perker shinned up that small tree very much faster than a boy after a bird's nest. By the time he was up his own length, spreading his legs as wide as he could, to get them higher, Smart, with admirable strategy, perceiving that the shelter of Mr. Perker's legs was withdrawn, ran around the tree, looking for a good place to climb it also. The bear ran around after Smart. This wound the rope around the tree; and, when Smart ran off at a tangent, the bear rushing after him was brought up with such a violent jerk of the noose upon his neck that he turned end for end and hit Smart with his hind legs, like the snap of a whip, while every bone in his back cracked. The shock almost

jerked Mr. Perker out of the tree, but he hung on grimly, and crawled up a few feet farther. By the time he was eight feet from the ground, however, the tree, which was only as large as a man's leg at the bottom, began to bend over with his weight, and he could go no higher.

The dog being out of his reach, the bear now ran back at Mr. Perker, and rearing up against the tree, tried to reach him. Mr. Perker again spread his legs wide apart, and drew himself up as far as he could. The bear cautiously raised himself a little higher and managed to give one of Mr. Perker's swaying legs a scratch that drew from him a yell of pain and fear. Then Smart rushed in and hung upon the bear's flank, and the bear and Smart dropped upon Mr. Perker's wheel. The bear got one foot through the spokes, and he and Smart went wildly cavorting about with the wheel, till Mr. Perker's anguish of mind and failure of muscle let him drop with a yell upon them, knocking the bear down. He did not, however, hold the bear down. On the contrary, he executed a prompt strategic movement, and did not stop rolling over until he brought up twenty feet away. Smart followed him, with that devotion for which he is noted, and the bear followed Smart, until snubbed again by the rope.

At this moment, when Mr. Perker most needed repose, his nerves were startled by the crack of a rifle. The ball sang over his head and pierced that of the bear, who immediately turned slowly around twice, and then sank down in a heap, quivering and kicking, whereupon Smart, with renewed courage, ran in and tugged terribly at one of his ears. As soon as Mr. Perker could comprehend what had happened, he was grateful. He thought the voice of the man who ran forward and asked: "Are you hurt?" was the most welcome sound he had ever heard. He replied that he was "only just a little out of breath." This reply wasn't strictly accurate. A sorrier looking object than Mr. Perker has rarely been seen on Sunday.

The man kicked Smart off the bear's ear, and then said, looking curiously at the disconsolate Mr. Perker;

"Why! Mr. Perker! how are you?"

Perker limply took his hand, looked at him, and answered:

"Hello! Smith!"

Then he shook Smith's hand heartily, for Smith was the identical man he was going to see. With Smith was the boy to whom Mr. Perker was taking the lasso.

The boy had stood gazing in open-mouthed wonder at the lassoed bear, at Perker, and at Smart, with which sagacious beast he had already struck up a treaty of amity and mutual admiration.

Smith noticed the rope and drew it from the neck of the dead bear.

"Was a tame critter, eh?" he asked,

Perker answered with unnecessary heat: "Tame! not by a blamed sight!"

"You wasn't trying to lead a wild bear into town with a rope, was you?" asked Smith, grinning.

"That's what I started to do," said Perker, seeing that honest confession was best, "but he came near leading me into his camp."

Then Perker told the whole story, and Smith sat down and laughed till exhausted. Finally he slapped Perker on the shoulder and said, with vast soberness:

"Well, Perker, you're the pluckiest chap I ever met! You couldn't have hired any man about here to undertake that job for ten dollars an hour!"

And he laughed again and fell to skinning the bear, chuckling. Then the boy wanted to know what he was going to do with the rope. This reminded Perker and he gave it to him. Never was a boy so thoroughly delighted. He had a lasso that had actually lassoed and held a wild bear, and a big one at that!

Perker found his idolized wheel in a sad state. Its rim was badly buckled, and half a dozen spokes were bent, but after some straightening and tightening, with Smith's aid, except for a wet saddle, rapidly drying, the wheel was as good as ever.

Mr. Smith proposed to cure the skin and send it to Mr. Perker, taking his city address for that purpose. This pleased Perker immensely; and they parted with mutual satisfaction.

When Mr. Perker reached the city, he limped home, and Mrs. Effie, while she tended his hurts, remarked: "Theophilus, you're too big a fool to be trusted to go alone into the woods! And the sooner you get rid of that fool of a dog the longer you'll be likely to dodge the Foolkiller!"

Mr. Perker did not report this observation to the Club, but Mrs. Perker's kitchen-girl reported it to Mrs. Littleweed's cook, and a course of pumping, by the Club wits, extracted the other facts from Mr. Perker.

This is the reason the members, when Mr. Perker proudly exhibits the bear-skin, sometimes speak of "Mr. Perker's bear," and sometimes of "Mr. Bear's Perker."