

For the Companion.

TALES TOLD BY A RANCH FIRESIDE.

I.—Wolfish Marauders.

Around my ranch the wolves molest full-grown animals but seldom, and never, so far as I know, attack or threaten human beings. They often kill calves and colts, and in one or two rare instances I have known of their hamstringing and tearing to pieces cows and steers. Westward of the Rockies, however, from the great main divide of the continent to the coast-line of British Columbia, Washington and Oregon, the wolves are larger and fiercer.

Our plains wolf is usually called the buffalo wolf, and varies from gray to white in color. The great timber wolf which haunts the deep forests of the northern Rockies and the coast ranges resembles ours in color, but has better,

in the soft soil were the footprints of several huge timber wolves. Following their tracks where they left the cow the settler soon discovered that there were three of them.

He came back that night and sat up in the clear, cold moonlight to get a shot at the marauders if they returned; but the cunning beasts circled around, got his wind and made off without giving him a chance at them. No animal is more difficult to outwit than one of these great wolves.

After this he carefully hosed his stock at night and watched it during the day, keeping even the dogs from wandering off into the forest. One clear, cold day he took out his oxen to haul in some logs from a couple of miles up the mountain. On his second trip down some accident occurred which made it necessary for him to leave the yoke of steers hitched to a tree, and go back to the house for some tools.

He had no idea that there was any danger in thus leaving the animals, for it did not occur to him that the wolves would dare to make an assault in open daylight where he had been passing and repassing along the road.

He went down to the cabin, got the axe and whatever tools were needed, and returned toward the oxen with one of his dogs frisking beside him.

On nearing the place where the oxen had been left, the dog suddenly pricked up its ears and raced off ahead of him. Stopping for a moment to listen, he heard up the mountain-side a crashing and struggling in the bushes and a savage growling and snarling, and instantly knew that his poor steers had been attacked by the wolves.

Shouting at the top of his voice, he ran up toward the place and soon heard the clamorous baying of the dog. On reaching a bend in the road he saw before him a scene of destruction.

The three wolves had come down the road and suddenly assailed the oxen, which, yoked as they were to a heavy sledge, and in addition tied to a tree, were unable either to escape or to make any resistance. The savage beasts had overthrown them and torn them terribly, although in their frantic dying struggles the oxen had overturned the sledge and smashed many of the neighboring saplings and small trees.

When the man came up, the three wolves were ravening on the warm flesh, while the dog, at some distance off, was baying and afraid to come near them.

The wolves at first seemed inclined to resist the man's approach. His rifle had been left in the sledge, and was lying overturned in the snow some thirty feet from the wolves, so that he had only his axe.

He advanced toward them, shouting and brandishing his weapon, and the dog, taking courage, went on slightly ahead of him. Two of the wolves slunk slowly off; the third, a huge gray beast, stood with its forepaws on one of the oxen, glaring at him and declining to leave.

The settler came on to within ten yards, and then skirted around to where his rifle lay in the snow, keeping a sharp lookout on the wolf for fear it might jump on him. On picking up the rifle he found that the snow had caked in the lock, and for a moment or two he was busy putting it in order.

During this time the great gray wolf wrenched the fore shoulder from the ox and trotted off with it into the forest. The two others then slouched along the edge of the clearing to join their comrade; but the settler was in time, by a quick shot, to take partial vengeance by breaking the back of the rearmost of the three.

The dog rushed forward and shook the dying beast and then, excited by the blood, dashed into the forest after the two others. He had not gone a hundred yards before the man heard him yell in agony, and hurrying toward him through the snow, found him lying with his throat and flanks cut open.

Evidently as soon as the two wolves had got out of rifle-shot they had turned savagely on the unfortunate dog and killed him.

The settler, furious at his loss and misfortune, instantly went down to the nearest neighbor to borrow two large steel bear-traps, which he intended to set by some bait.

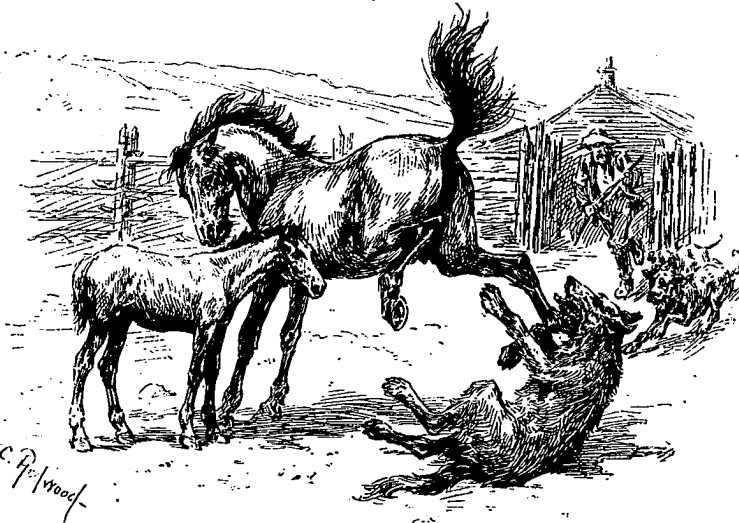
Three nights afterward one of his enemies bearded him on his very threshold; for as one of the dogs was walking from the barn over to the house just after nightfall a great wolf suddenly galloped out of the darkness, overthrew and throttled the dog in the twinkling of an eye, though it was a large and strong beast, and started to drag the animal into the bushes.

The two remaining dogs, however, rushed forward to the rescue of their comrade, and as the man appeared at the same moment, the wolf sullenly drew off into the thicket. Immediately the man set one of the iron traps by the body of the dead dog, and went back into his house.

In an hour afterward the wolf returned. The carcass had been left not a hundred yards from the hut, and the spring of the trap and the savage growl of pain of the wolf were both distinctly audible.

Seizing a torch and his axe, the settler threw open the door and rushed out with his dogs, which raced ahead. As he ran up toward the trap a furious worrying and snarling told him that the trapped wolf was being throttled by the comrades of the dead dog.

On reaching the scene of conflict the torch



The last of the Robber Wolves.

and on the whole darker, fur; is a longer-legged, longer-toothed, more sinewy beast.

In winter the timber wolves become very bold, and then sometimes attack man. Whenever the snow is on the ground they become dangerous to the settlers' live stock. Sometimes singly, but more often in twos or threes, they will boldly assail the largest horse or horned animal. Unlike the panther they rarely make their main attack at the throat, preferring to hamstring their prey and then tear out the flanks and stomach.

A settler in northern Idaho once told me of the damage a small party of these great wolves inflicted on him, and the way in which he finally got rid of them.

His little outlying farm was situated in the heart of a great pine and spruce forest well up in the mountains. There were some beaver meadows along the banks of the stream by which his log house stood, and there were open glades in the valleys and on the hillsides, while a stump-dotted clearing surrounded his cabin.

He had put up a log barn and farm-yard corral; and his live stock consisted of a horse, a mare with her colt, a yoke of oxen for plowing his grain land, and a milk cow, together with four powerful dogs accustomed to battle with wild beasts.

Early one winter the wolves made their first descent upon him. The milk cow had been left out to pick up her living in the woods during the daytime, as it was certain that she would return at night to her calf in the yard. On the day in question, however, she did not come back; and early the next morning the settler started out to look for her, taking his dogs with him.

A mile from the house, in an open glade, the dogs suddenly struck the trail of some wild beast of a dangerous kind, as was indicated by the bristling of their hair and their low growling. This trail led up the mountain, but the settler called his dogs away from it and forced them to follow it back the other way until he came to a little glade, in which lay the remains of the cow.

There the ground was very much torn up, and

showed the wolf held firmly by one forepaw, and yet holding his own fairly well against the two powerful dogs, both of which he had wounded. However, they had him fast, one by the side of the neck and the other by the flank, and the settler put an end to the conflict with his axe.

After this he believed he was safe, as he did not suppose that the third wolf would linger around the neighborhood where the other two had been killed. For six weeks, indeed, he saw no sign of it. Then one day he came across the huge footprints of the robber in the snow, where it had been walking around and around the house. Again it went off and did not come back until early in the spring.

This wolf was, as he saw by the tracks, the largest of the three—probably the one which had stood on the body of the ox and defied him as he approached. The game had been driven by the snow from the neighboring mountains, and evidently the brute was very hungry.

One morning early the settler decided to go down the mountain, and accordingly saddled his horse. In putting on the bridle the horse for some reason took fright at him, broke off and ran away up the wood road. He followed it at once.

After going half a mile he topped a slight rise and saw the horse in a beaver meadow, some six hundred yards ahead. As he saw it he also noticed a great gray figure come galloping out of the spruce woods through the snow toward the unfortunate animal.

The horse saw his foe at the same moment, and started down the road on a desperate run. But before he could get under way the wolf galloped alongside and seized it by the outstretched hock with such violence that the teeth met clean through the sinews, and the horse was brought down on his haunches.

It gave a piercing whinny of despair, and the wolf let go for a moment. But the instant the horse again attempted to start off it was seized by the other hock and completely hamstrung. Before the man could come up its flank was torn open and its life was extinct. Nevertheless the settler drove off the wolf before it had a chance to snatch more than a mouthful or two.

He brought out the mare and dragged the saddle horse down to his cabin, where he left it outside the door, intending to use it as bait the following day. That same evening, however, the wolf, evidently maddened with hunger, visited the farm-house.

It was just dusk, and the mare and her colt were in the corral, when the great gray beast crept up to the outside and leaped suddenly over the high stockade to get at the colt, which ran frantically toward the mare. As the wolf followed, the mare, wheeling around, lashed out with her hind legs and struck him squarely in the face, breaking his lower jaw.

The scuffle had called out the dogs, which rushed furiously to the rescue. The wolf turned and galloped toward the stockade, but stunned by the mare's blow, he missed his jump the first time and fell backward. As he rose one of the dogs seized him by the ham.

He fought savagely, but with his broken under jaw he could do little damage. When the settler, roused by the tumult, rushed in with his rifle, it was to find the last one of the three beasts which had done him so much damage dying under the fangs of the dogs.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.