THE GREAT MIGRATION

motion of the boat, and the constrained attitudes in which it placed them, the loading was a slow process; and, before any   
of the had a bullet down, the bear was close astern. Only ivan had a barred loaded; and this, unfortunately, was with small  
shot, which he had been keeping for waterfowl. He fired it, nevertheless, right into the teeth of the pursuer, but, instead  
of stopping him, it only increased his rage, and roused him to make still greater efforts to overtake the canoe. Pouchskin,  
in despair, threw down his gun, and seized upon an axe, that by good luck had been brought in the boat. With this firmly  
grasped in his hands and kneeling in the stern, he waited the approach of the infuriated swimmer. The bear had got close  
up to the boat in fact was within the length of his own body of touching it. Believing himself now near enough, he made  
one of his prodigious bounds, and launched himself forward. His sharp claws rattled against the birch bark, tearing a large  
flake from the craft. Had this not given way, his hold would have been complete; and the boat would in all likelihood,  
have been dragged, stern foremost, under water. But the failure of this clutch brought the head of the monster once  
more on a level with the surface; and before he could raise it to make a second spring, the great wedge of steel  
descended upon his crown, and went crashing through his skull. Almost in the same instant he, was seen to turn over in   
the water; his limbs moved only with a spasmodic action; he gave a feeble kick or with his long hind legs; and then his   
carcass floated along the surface like a mass of white foam it was soon secured and drawn out upon the bank for the   
purpose of being stripped of its snow white robe. Our young hunters would have been contented to have left the others  
alone neither the female nor her cubs being required by them. But the voyageurs who were desirous of obtaining the   
skins of all on their own account proposed returning to effect their destruction; and in this proposal they were backed  
by pouchskin, who had a natural antipathy to all bears. It ended in the killing of the dam, and the capturing of the cubs  
alive; for encumbered as the old she was with her offspring, she was soon overtaken and fell an easy victim to the volley  
of bullets that were poured into her from all sides at once. With the skins of the old bears, and the cubs tied in the   
bottom of the canoe, our hunters started back down stream; but they had scarce parted from the place, before the  
ravenous wolves returned not only to devour the carcases of the bears, but also those of their own comrades that had  
fallen in the encounter the barren grounds. The barren ground bear was next to be sought for; but to reach the haunts  
of this animal a long and toilsome journey must be made. That tract of the hudson’s bay territory known as the barren  
grounds, extends from the shores of the arctic sea as far south as the latitude of the churchill river; bounded eastward by  
hudson’s bay itself, and westward by a chain of lakes, of which the great slave and athapescow are the principal. This   
immense territory is almost unexplored to the present hour. Even the hudson’s bay trappers have a very imperfect   
knowledge of it. It has been crossed in one or places, and skirted by exploring parties, but it is still almost a terra ignota,  
except to the or tribes of indians who dwell around its borders, and the esquimaux, who venture a little way into it   
along the coast of the arctic sea. Before proceeding to hunt the barren ground bear, let us say a word about his species.  
By writters, both old and modern he has been variously classed. Even the ablest naturalist who has written about him is  
puzzled as to his species. We speak of sir john Richardson, the companion of the lamented franklin, and himself one of  
the great men of the earth. Sir john first regarded this bear, though very doubtfully as a variety of the ursus americanus,  
or american black bear. Later observations influenced him to change this opinion; and again with modest doubtfulness  
characteristic of the man he suggests his being a variety of the ursus arctos. We shall make bold to affirm that he is a   
variety of neither; but a distinct species of bear. We shall give our reasons and first, as to his distinctness from the ursus  
americanus. He is not like the latter, either in colour, shape of body, bulk, profile, physiognomy, length of feet or tail. In  
all these respects he bears a greater resemblance to the ursus arctos, or even to his nearer neighbour, the grizzly (ursus  
ferox). He differs from both these however in other points as will presently be seen. Again, he is of a fiercer disposition  
than the black bear, and more dangerous to the hunter almost as much so as the grizzly and quite as much as the brown.  
Moreover, he dwells in a country in which the black bear could not make his home. To the existence of the latter, the   
forest is essential; and he is never found far out of it. It is not the higher latitude that keeps him out of the barren  
grounds, but the absence of timber. This is proved by the fact of his being found quite as far northward as any part of the  
barren grounds, but where the limestone formation favours the growth of trees; whereas, among the primitive rocks to   
the north of nelson river, the black bear does not exist the very region that appears most favourable to the existence of   
the barren ground species who cares not for trees, and cannot climb them. Still another material difference may be

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