

14 THE BATTLE OF THE BEARS

valuable now, as it would be some months hence in the colder weather.

When my words and requests were emphatic, they were always listened to by my Indians and promptly carried out. But to-day, somehow or other, they seemed to lack the snap which always brought the prompt compliance with them; and these men, quick to read me, said, with the merest twinkle of the eye:

‘Ookemou (master), wish to go on, or see a bear hunt?’ When there is a disposition to surrender we are easily conquered. So I capitulated and said: ‘Well, show me a first-class one, and be quick about it.’

The first thing they did was to withdraw the charges of duck shot from their guns and reload them with bullets. Their flint guns will throw a ball about a hundred yards as well as an ordinary rifle. My Martini-Henry rifle was charged with a fresh cartridge, while my men gave a quick glance at their sheath knives to see that they were in perfect condition, for in a bear-fight no one knows what may happen.

The next thing now was to get near that bear.