

THE BLACK BEAR

If a directory were written in the language of the woods, the entry for the Bear family would read: "Mrs. and Mr. Bear." The latter is not the head of the family; he is not even a family man. He has a wife for a while during the summer but goes off and forgets her in the fall and takes to a Bohemian life in the fields and forests.

With Mrs. Bear it is a different story. She earns her own living, grows fat in the fall, hunts up a house of her own and when it gets cold, crawls off in her fine warm rug for a ninety-day nap. This is a preparation for events to come. Along about the time when we celebrate the birthday of Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, or a little earlier, twins arrive in the den while the mother is taking her hibernal sleep. Occasionally it is triplets.

At birth a bear cub is a very immature baby. Mother Bruin may weigh three or four hundred pounds, while one of her cubs may weigh only twelve ounces. As a rule, he is about eight inches long and covered with short brown velvety hair. His eyes are closed like those of newborn puppies or kittens. He changes so slowly that it is thirty or forty days before his eyes are open and another month before he is restless to get outdoors.. Here is where Mother Bruin's family foresight comes in. With her reserve of fat she can lie in bed and feed the cubs forty days and forty nights with neither nurse nor refreshment.

The coming out of Mrs. Bruin and her children is timed by the grass on the south slopes and the skunk cabbage in the swamp. From then on, the paw that rocked the cubs' cradle rules the bear

world. She may be amiable in disposition if the family larder is full but testy in temper if the children have colic. The cubs stick to their mother until they are nearly grown, and she fights their battles.