

CLOSE LOOK AT A HARE

by "SUNDOWNER"

HUDSON or Darwin or J. A. Thomson—I can't at present remember which—says that we libel hares when we call them timid. It is not timidity, he argues, when they fly like the wind from their enemies. It is capacity and wisdom. Nor is it cowardice when they fight with their feet and not with their teeth. That is intelligence. They can, and often do, use both feet and teeth;

but the use of their hind feet in battle is as sensible, and can be as effective, as the devastating rip of a kangaroo.

I am not sure that it is a convincing argument, but I thought of it tonight when I caught a hare in a rabbit trap—the first blunder of that kind I have seen a hare make—and as I stooped to pick it up, received trap and hare in the face. I don't suggest that it was courage, or even ferocity. It was panic and unusual strength in the hind legs. But since the light was going, and the leap was accompanied by a very unusual noise, half chatter and half growl, it was a very effective manoeuvre, and sheer bad luck for the hare that the inanimate trap was not as easily startled as I was.

I think vitality is a hare's outstanding quality, and of that, too, I have had experience this week. I had a lying-down shot from about 40 yards at one of the hares the drought has sent to feed in my garden, and only the plump of the bullet told me that I had not missed. The hare gave no sign at all. He had been moving slowly before I fired, hopping for a yard or two and then standing up to look round, and he went on in precisely the same way after the bullet hit him. I therefore fired a second time, and was again sure that I had not missed; but the only sign given by the hare was a change of direction. He had been working uphill, and now turned down hill, moving nearly a chain in the same deliberate way before he rolled over dead. The first bullet had missed his spine by a fraction of an inch; the second had torn his heart.

THE belief that hares chew the cud came to me, I am sure, from the Bible, or from some older person who read it in the Bible; and it died hard. Long after I knew that it was an

error I would find myself repeating what I had previously believed, namely, that the difference between hares and rabbits is that hares chew the cud and rabbits don't. The fact that hares live above the ground and rabbits underneath was not, I thought, an important difference; nor did it make them different animals that one came into the world clothed and the other naked. Chewing the cud, on the other hand, involved structural differences; two stomachs at least instead of one, and the mechanism for transferring food from one container to the other. I had often noticed, during the post-mortems that all boys conduct on the animals they kill, that a hare has a very big heart; but although I had never noticed anything special about its stomach, I knew that there must be something special if it ruminated. And I knew that it ruminated because the Bible said so. It was, in fact, one of my priggish pleasures when I was a boy to spring that knowledge on the uninformed, and triumphantly quote my



"... it means deeper ditches ..."

authority if I was questioned. It did not occur to me then that the Bible could be wrong, and I must have been 30 or older before I was told that it was wrong. Now I never handle a dead hare without having another look inside to make sure.

But I blundered badly today. When I tried to persuade Ng. to jug my hare,



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