

The other stood dumb before him, and he continued—

"You scoundrel! If I treated you as you deserve, I would fling you down on to that glacier, and leave your bones to rot there till the Day of Judgment."

As he spoke, he advanced a step or two along the narrow ridge of the moraine, and the other retired an equal space before him. Thoroughly frightened as he was, he knew that that threat, at all events, could not be executed by the inferior cragsman.

"You won't do that, Gordon," he stammered out. You have your remedy, but you won't use that."

"Yes, by God!" Gordon answered, seeing the impossibility of this immediate vengeance. "I have my remedy, and I mean to take it. You're afraid of me now, you coward; but you'll be more scared still when you stand up to my pistol at fifteen paces. I may not be able to climb mountains, but I can shoot straight. Heriot. You know that I can shoot straight, don't you?"

"No," he added, as a further thought struck him, "you won't refuse to fight me. You won't dare. If you won't stand up to me like a man, I will shoot you like a dog, and take the consequences."

He meant every word he said, and George Heriot knew it. He was a coward, and his cheeks were blanched, though Basil Gordon could not see it for the mist. Then his fears suggested an idea to him, and in the white darkness of the mist, he saw his one chance of ultimate deliverance from danger.

"You needn't be afraid," he said. "I will meet you and fight you, when and where you like—always supposing that you get off this mountain alive. Under the circumstances you will hardly expect me to show you the way down. The track is a little awkward in the fog. I hope you'll find it."

So speaking he turned away and disappeared into the mist. For a few minutes his feet were heard plunging in the loose and treacherous shale, and then there was no sound save the noise of the streams that ran out of the chert, and bounded down over the rocks in cataracts.

Left to himself, Basil Gordon had but little chance of the proper route to take to get safely down to Kandersteg. By daylight he could have found the way easily enough with ordinary caution. But now the unnatural darkness of the fog was beginning to be complicated with the natural darkness of the night, and he could barely see his hand before his face.

Fortunately, he had taken a general survey of the track before the fog came on, and knew that he must follow the line of the lateral moraine, and then ascend to the left, instead of taking what, in the dark, would have seemed the more obvious course of descending to the right. For the route to the right led only to the cliffs down which the glacier streams foam and tumble, but where no human foot can find a place to stand; while that to the left leads to the beginning of that intricate system of steep slopes which constitutes the one puzzle of the descent.

To get there it is necessary to cross all these little glacier cataracts aforesaid. By the help of his alpenstock a man can leap across them in any situation, serve as stepping stones; but as he could not see his way, Basil Gordon had to wade through them with imminent danger, where the stream ran strongly, of being washed off his feet.

It was an inexpressibly tedious process. At times he stumbled over stones he could not see, and bruised himself, and nearly sprained his ankle. At other times he sank nearly to his knees in the damp shale, which seemed to threaten to absorb him like a quicksand. At last, however, he got finally clear of the moraine. The ground was harder, and the rocks were fewer; and he was able to clamber up the final ascent.

Considering his inexperience, it was almost a miracle that he had got so far in safety. However, he had only just reached the point at which the real difficulties begin. He now faintly perceived that he was in the midst of a series of low parallel grassy knolls, and that, in the hollows between the knolls, lay the beginnings of steep grass slopes, by one of which it was necessary for him to descend. There was nothing to guide him to the selection of the right one, so he sat down and reflected for a while. Then he started, experimentally and cautiously, down one of them, holding his alpenstock in readiness to arrest a fall.

Before he had gone many paces, the decline began to get ominously abrupt, and, just as the advisability of turning back began to dawn on him, he felt his foot slipping. With all his might he ground his alpenstock into the soil beside him, and, dropping gently into a sitting posture, managed to prevent himself from falling further. For five or ten minutes he sat there feeling the cold chill that runs through a man when he has suddenly saved himself from sudden peril. When he had recovered himself a little, and turned to think of climbing back again to the summit of the ridge, he found that he had wholly lost his bearings. His nerves were so shaken that it seemed to him that he was lying with abysmal precipices on every side of him, and he dared not crawl either up or down, lest he should crawl over the cliff's edge into empty space before he was aware of it.

Yet he was resolved to live, if only for the sake of his revenge.

"I won't die till I've killed that man," he said to himself, "even if I have to sit here and freeze till the fog lifts."

Then he made his preparations to spend the night upon the slope. He kicked little clefts in the turf in which to rest his heels, and pushed the iron-shod point of his alpenstock farther into the ground, and sat there, resting both his hands on it, that he might not slip. His feet were wet; the temperature was scarcely above freezing point, and falling fast; there was barely a tablespoon of brandy left in his flask, and he had nothing to eat except a single stick of chocolate. He ate it and sipped the cognac, and so temporarily stayed the faintness that was coming over him. Afterwards, he got out his pipe, and filled and lit it, and so waited for the dawn.

No one but those who have been benighted on the high Alps will fully realize the horrors of that dreadful bivouac. Only a man with a constitution of cast-iron could have lived through it. But Basil Gordon had a purpose to live for, and it supported him.

Towards the morning he even slept a little. The noise of a thunderstorm mingled with his dream, and he fancied that he was chasing George Heriot through the mountains with his revolver. Then he awoke to find that the mist had scattered, and that the snowfields of the Doldenhorn and Weisse Frau were crimsoned by the newly-risen sun.

"At last," he said to himself. "Now I can go down to Kandersteg and shoot him."

After all, he found he was nowhere near a precipice, and now that he could see the way he was easily able to clamber up again to the place from which he had descended. Nor had he any difficulty in recovering the track. Some rough steps hewn in the rock indicated the beginning of it, and ordinary care enabled him to follow the remainder of the route. There were some *chalets* on the Oeschinen Alp, and a small boy from one of them indicated the little pathway that winds along the cliff high up above the Oeschinen See. Basil Gordon followed it without accident until he reached the little inn kept by the boatman at the extremity of the lake.

The boatman himself was out upon the lake; but his wife brought Basil Gordon wine, bread and butter, and honey, and set on the kettle to boil to make tea for him. He ate and drank, and, though still stiff and miserable, felt revived.

After he had paid the bill, he strolled out on the beach. The boatman was rowing back to the shore, and, as Basil Gordon stepped down there, the keel was just grating on the pebbles.

In the bows of the boat lay a ghastly burden—the dead body of a man. The face was hidden by the boatman's coat; but Basil Gordon drew the covering off, and recognised the features of the man who had deserted him on the mountain, meaning that he should die there.

"I found the body there," the boatman said, pointing to a stretch of silver across the lake, three-quarters of a mile away.

Basil Gordon lifted the field-glass he carried, and swept the cliffs with it. What had happened was clear to him beyond doubt or question. In his confidence, George Heriot had lost his way without knowing he had lost it; he had started to descend the wrong grass slope, and in doing so, had slipped and fallen. And, when once a man begins to slide down the steep grass slopes of the Oeschinen Alp, there is no further hope for him. Neither his alpenstock nor his prayers can stay him. There are no roots to cling to; no boulders for his feet to strike against; but he will slide on and on, faster and faster, until there is no more grass slope to slide on, but only empty space to fall through. The smiling bosom of the little Oeschinen See receives him, and the rest is silence.

"Take care of the body," Basil Gordon said. "I will see that someone is sent from Kandersteg to fetch it. There will be no difficulty about identification."

Then he turned and struggled down the short remainder of the path to the Hotel Victoria, pondering many things.—Francis Grihble, in *The Idler*.

IN THE HEART OF A SWAMP.

What a charm is there in swamp-lands and how dear to a lover of wild, wet, green places is the tracing of a stream to its source in the heart of a wilderness! We have followed one to-day through broad, bright meadows and up this great hill, climbing at times in mid-stream wide flights of stone steps, and it has been altogether pleasant—this walk in the water with the stream-bubbles breaking about our feet and a rush of silver drops everywhere.