



"SCOTT WAS LYING APPARENTLY SENSELESS."—P. 352.

A BANG AT A NORWEGIAN BEAR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A DEAD MAN'S DIARY."

FRANKLY, I never for a moment supposed when we set out on that now somewhat memorable expedition that we should as much as come within eyesight, still less gunshot, of anything in the shape of bear's flesh. Nor were we prepared to encounter game of such description; for although in our anxiety to keep clear of tourists we had been "roughing it" a good deal on the mountains—twice contriving to get hopelessly lost and once running so short of provender that we were reduced to dining on a kind of moss—yet the ostensible object of our visit to Norway on this particular occasion was fishing and mountain climbing. We were a party of four, consisting of Hannon, a big, burly Irishman, six feet something high, and great in the matter of calves and chest; Paul (so called on account of his likeness to the "Paul Vasher" of Helen Mather's "Comin' Thro' the Rye"); Scott (of whom more anon), and the present scribe.

Hannon, Paul and myself were all sportsmen of some sort, and old chums; but Scott was a bookworm and a bit of an outsider, who was more at home with the paper knife than with a gun. He was a tiny little fellow, chiefly noticeable for his stoop and his glasses; had just taken a B. A. at London, and very nearly killed himself in so doing. He and I had been up at school together, but I had lost sight of him until the week before we started for Norway, when, seeing by his pale face and nervous manner that he was sadly in want of a change, I asked him haphazard to join our party. Somewhat to my surprise he instantly assented, and hence it was that we four found ourselves sitting together in the train that runs from Bergen to Vossvangen, at which latter place we proposed to fly the madding crowd and strike out 'cross country.

Now, our hunting of the bear was in this wise: We had slept one night at a *seter* (mountain farm), below which was a lake where we were told some large fish were to be caught. Hannon had risen before daybreak to try an early "cast," and had taken Svendsen, the owner of the *seter*, with him, and it was arranged that the two should go on to the nearest

"station" (some fifteen miles or so distant), to obtain certain articles of which we stood in need. We hardly expected them back before evening, but they did not arrive until past 10, when Scott, Paul and myself were just contemplating "turning in," and brought the exciting story that they had seen a bear, and a large one, down by the water's edge. Scott, who ever since we set foot in Norway, had been wild on the subject of bear hunting, instantly proposed that we should sally forth then and there in pursuit. To this I demurred.

Scott, however, who is a self-willed little fellow when he takes anything into his head, was not to be balked of his Bruin, and before I had quite made up my mind what to do I found the whole affair settled. Svendsen, it seemed, knew all about bears and had shot two of them, so it was arranged that he was to be chief actor in the drama in which Scott and Paul and myself were to be spectators—spectators for the reason only that we had no weapons with us more deadly than stout walking sticks.

Svendsen looked more like bed than bear hunting, having been up since a in the morning, but the promise of three five-kroner pieces from Scott amply satisfied him; and after a hastily-dispatched supper we started off on our foolhardy expedition. Although it was now close upon midnight it was so light that one could see to read distinctly, and our way lay clear before us.

The bear, as Svendsen said, had, on catching sight of him and Hannon, turned tail most ignominiously and made off as fast as he could up the mountain; and up the mountain we now directed our steps. I was keeping a sharp lookout as we went along—not for the bear, as I had no expectation of seeing one, but for Hannon, who, I was convinced? intended playing one of his practical jokes upon us, and would, I expected, probably personate *Ursa Major* himself—when I saw something moving in a cleared space in front of us and promptly called the attention of the others to it. I don't think that I am more cowardly than the majority of folk, but I must confess that for a moment a

thrill of something very much like fear came over me when, in that weird Norwegian twilight, I saw—sitting upon his haunches and washing his face with his paws, very much in the way that a cat performs that operation—not Hannon, but a shaggy monster of a bear. He was still some distance from us, but well within gunshot, and without a word Svendsen raised the rifle to his shoulder and fired.

What with the beating of my heart and the smoke of the gun I could at first see nothing of what had happened, and when the smoke cleared away Bruin was gone. As with common consent, and before Svendsen could say a word to prevent us, Scott and I gave tongue in a wild yell and sprang forward in pursuit. I remember leaping from rock to rock and from boulder to boulder like a madman, Scott following closely at my heels, and Paul so I heard after) some little way behind. Then—I can recall it all distinctly—we turned the corner of a rock and came full upon the bear, who, with his haunches close to the ground as if he were wounded? was dragging himself along by means of his fore legs. I just saw him wrinkle up his snout with a snarl (more querulous, it seemed to me, than aggressive); I saw a red light in his cunning little eyes, the gleam of some brownish-white teeth, and then it suddenly occurred to me that I didn't see how I could spare time to make further investigations, and—shall I frankly confess it?—I took to my heels as fast as I could run, never stopping until I found myself standing by Svendsen.

Then it was, and not before, that I looked back and saw Scott flying for his life along the mountain, with the bear trundling after him in a steady, business-like, but apparently leisurely way. He, however, got over the ground at a pace that I should scarcely have believed possible in so clumsy a creature. For a second or two the path led down hill, and we could distinctly see that Scott was increasing the distance between himself and his pursuer; but immediately afterward he took to level ground again, and it was only too evident that the race was over. With every step the huge brute drew nearer and nearer, and in another moment he adroitly put out his paw and tripped poor Scott up, as neatly as a wrestler trips up a bumpkin at a country fair. I suppose I

ought to say that at this point I sprang forward and ran to the rescue. Honestly, I did nothing of the sort; for not only was I fifty yards or nearly so away, and quite unarmed, but I was so horrified at the fate which seemed about to befall my unlucky companion that I stood there like one spellbound.

The sight I then beheld I shall not soon forget. Scott was lying, apparently senseless, under a vast shelf of rock which seemed to lurch forward and overhang the path like a roof. Beside him stood the bear, with his snout close to his victim, as if he were smelling or taking stock of him. Next, he turned Scott over two or three times with his paw, and then, half contemptuously I thought, rolled him along some five or six yards, as though he were in doubt as to whether he had found an antagonist worthy of his mettle. For one moment I hoped that all might yet be well, but in the next I saw Bruin raise himself upon his haunches and stretch out both his fore legs to the full, as if preparing himself for a trial of strength.

Then, just as he stooped to pick up and hug his victim, I heard Svendsen's rifle ring out sharp and clear, and I saw the monster drop Scott and advance angrily some ten or twelve paces forward to front his new assailant; but he stopped, seemed to hesitate, as if in doubt, and finally faced about to return to Scott. Those seconds of hesitation sealed his fate, for the next instant the huge overhanging roof of rock under which he stood loosened, probably caused by the vibration of the gun's discharge, swayed for a moment above his head, and then, with a rush and roar, like that of the crack of doom, toppled over and hurled itself upon him.

When the dust and smoke had subsided and we were able to advance in search of our missing comrade, we found him where he had been rolled by the bear, just out of the way of the landslide. He was more shaken in nerves than bruised in body, but I have received a letter from him since I began this paper and it seems that he is now nearly all right again. He doesn't, however, seem quite as eager to go hunting without a gun, and I don't suppose he will ever make another special visit to Norway for the purpose of having one more final and finishing "bang at a bear."