

## A NIGHT IN THE LARIG.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

"Vague miles of moorland behind us lay  
Scarce traversed ere the day  
Sank, and the sun forsook us at our need,  
Belated.

All night long, . . . . .  
Skies and waters were soft and deep :  
Shadow clothed them, and silence made  
Soundless music of dream and shade :  
All above us, the livelong night,  
Shadow, kindled with sense of light ;  
All around us, the brief night long,  
Silence, laden with sense of song".

—SWINBURNE.

How I came to spend a night in the Larig (Learg Ghrumach) is, like all misadventures in the mountains, a little inexplicable on calm reflection. I suppose over-confidence was largely accountable for the occurrence—over-confidence, combined with miscalculation (or rather, perhaps, neglect of calculation) of time and distance, particularly time. Nightfall is comparatively early in September, and due allowance had not been made for that circumstance, for it was on Friday, 1st September last, that the mishap of getting benighted in the Larig befell me—a mishap, the discomfort and danger of which were doubled by my having dragged my wife into it. A night out on a hillside is (or ought to be) nothing to a man, but the experience has a different complexion when you unwittingly subject a lady to participation in it. The romance of the situation is then extinguished by the remorse you feel for the plight into which you have brought your companion.

After all, the programme projected for the day on which we got benighted, though a big one, was perfectly feasible—provided sufficient time were allowed. Driving from Loch an Eilein to Glenmore Lodge by the forest road to

Coylum Bridge, we were to ascend Cairngorm, walk over to Ben Muich Dhui, descend into the Larig, and walk along the Pass to Auldrue, and back by the forest road to Loch an Eilein. Our first misfortune lay in not making an early enough start, due to the reluctance of one of us (I shall not say which) to get up "at an ungodly hour in the morning". We did not set out till 10 a.m., and did not begin the walk from Glenmore Lodge till 11.30. Then, when we got to the point where the track up Cairngorm leaves the private path to the forest, a gillie politely conveyed to us an equally polite request from the Marquis of Zetland that we would halt for half an hour so as not to come in view of a herd of deer his lordship was stalking. It would have been churlish to refuse, but, alas! that sacrifice of precious time to the interests of sport involved us in "a night out" in the Larig! Deerstalkers and other "gunners" will please note that not all pedestrians are the "spoil-sports" so often imagined.

Not forcing the pace, and lunching *en route* (and during a heavy shower of rain), it was 3 p.m. before we reached the summit of Cairngorm. Here, a companion left us—to make faster walking, as he was to cross Ben Muich Dhui and go on to Inverey. The afternoon being exceedingly fine, we walked rather leisurely over the ground between Cairngorm and Ben Muich Dhui—not quite the level plateau, by the way, that it looks as viewed from either summit. We gave up our original intention of going to the top of Ben Muich Dhui, and made instead for the depression leading to the Allt Choire Mhoir, descending by the side of the burn, and reaching the Larig about 6 o'clock. We finished what eatables we had with us at one of the Pools of Dee (again in another heavy shower of rain), and then walked steadily along the Pass, quickening our pace as the gloom of nightfall began to descend on the narrow ravine through which we were making our way. It soon became a race against time—a race to get out of the Pass before complete darkness overtook us. We duly got past the dark, beetling crags of the Lurcher's Rock—which takes more time to do than one would think—and we crossed the

Larig Burn in the fading light about half-past 8. It was with a sigh of relief that, having thus cleared the defile, we got on to the high ground on the right bank of the burn, but the satisfaction was of very short duration. Gradually, we lost all sight of the track, though managing somehow to keep on it or in its direction for some time—now losing it, then regaining it. My knowledge of the general line of the path enabled us to get past the two or three knolls on the left-hand side—one, it may be remembered, scarred by a landslip; but, shortly after doing that, we were obliged to give up the attempt to make further progress. We were undoubtedly off the track, and could not possibly recover it in the darkness. We were on very rough ground—clumps of heather of uncertain height and width alternating with still more dubious bits of bog and large stones and tree-roots; a false step in the dark might have involved serious consequences. A halt must be made—there was no other alternative. We should just have to wait where we were till the light of morning revealed the path again, or at least enabled us to make our way in safety. So, moving a little up the hillside on our right, and, eschewing the heather, which was too wet to permit of our lying on it, about 9.30 we selected as suitable a stone for a night's repose (!) as we could find, and there we sat down, to spend the hours intervening before morning with such fortitude and complacency as we could command.

What a predicament! Here we were (as I judged at the time, and as was revealed next morning) opposite Carn Elrick, and just outside the line of straggling trees that marks the limits of the forest. We were only two miles from the post that indicates the entrance to the Pass; and had we but gained that well-known point, we could readily have made our way home, even in the dark, by the forest road—a road with which we had become perfectly familiar. Oh! for that half-hour so light-heartedly surrendered to oblige Lord Zetland! We were, of course, lightly clad, and had no "wraps" except mackintoshes; our boots and stockings were soaking wet. Spirits we had none (probably a good thing on the whole, though a "nip" would have been

very acceptable), and, as has been indicated, our meagre luncheon had long since been exhausted. I had several cigars remaining of a handful given me by an Aberdeen friend with whom we parted at Glenmore Lodge, but I had expended my matches in looking for the path. Fortunately, one was left, and, lighting a cigar, I indulged in what the Americans call a "chain-smoke", lighting a second cigar from the first, and so on. The best cigars, however, provide little alleviation of a weary wait for daylight, and of the discomfort of resting (!) on a hard, cold stone. But they helped materially, along with the sweet influences of the night, to assuage the rather angry feelings with which I first contemplated the situation. Disappointment, irritation, mortification—I experienced all in turn; but these feelings gradually gave way to something like philosophic calm. "What can't be cured must be endured" is a maxim of universal application; and, "stranded" in the Larig at night by mischance, you must e'en put up with it till morning. So long as it did not rain, no serious result was likely to ensue to two healthy people, fortified by a fortnight's life in "the open" in Strathspey. The night, fortunately, was exceedingly mild, stars were in the sky, and, though clouds occasionally swept along, causing some anxiety, they passed overhead with never "a spit" in them. There was a delicious stillness, not sensibly marred—in a sense, even added to—by the soft murmuring of the Larig Burn and a little contributory coursing down a corrie opposite us, the two streams, curiously enough, sounding different notes. One by one, distant lights in the Spey valley were extinguished; and then, amid the all-prevailing darkness, shone out fitfully at times bright, flickering, white or bluish-coloured lights at various spots, which I am assured could only be attributable to ignis fatuus, or "will o' the wisp"—I declare it was worth sitting out a night in the Larig to witness this natural phenomenon. Now and again, the melancholy "toot" of a locomotive whistle would be heard, and the roll of a train on the rails would be distinctly borne on the air. Beyond these sounds, and the occasional call of a bird, nothing else broke the stillness. The absolute quiet was of

itself sufficient to induce slumber, but the hardness of the couch and the chilliness of the early hours were antagonistic, and, at the best, we only dozed, even if we did that.

The proverbial "darkest hour before the dawn" was duly experienced, and then daylight broke. With its appearance, a little after 4 o'clock, we "got up", but only to be reminded that there is light in the sky long before there is light on the ground. We had to wait fully half an hour before the light was sufficient to enable us to see our way. Then we speedily regained the track—only a few yards distant, of course—and, making our feet our friends, and walking at a swinging pace, we reached our temporary quarters a little after 6 o'clock. I have only to add that neither of us suffered in the slightest degree from our night's exposure in the Larig, which we are now disposed to regard as rather an enjoyable adventure, fraught with new experiences.

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#### MOUNTAINEERING.

God's hills, high places where is found solace  
For jaded mind and aching heart, and where,  
Above the heat and turmoil, rid of care,  
We hold communion for a little space  
With higher things; and, standing face to face  
With duty and with life, our lucent eyes  
Drink in the majesty, and recognise  
The clear-flashed truth that there is plenteous grace  
Below, around, above. So scaled the Christ  
The lofty Hermon, crowned with winters' snows,  
Thereon to keep with helpful spirits tryst  
And get fresh courage and a brief repose—  
The Mountaineer in glist'ring raiment trod,  
And was declared to be the Son of God.

G. W.