

SUNRISE FROM MOUNT KEEN.

BY WILL. ROBERTSON.

It was with considerable doubt as to the success of the excursion that a party of four left Craighendinnie, near Aboyne, on a July evening, to climb Mount Keen, and witness, if possible, sunrise from the summit. All day the wind had been blowing fiercely from the north-west, carrying across the sky a continuous succession of threatening clouds, which broke every now and again in cold and biting showers. But this quartette had cycled far to keep the engagement, and, though the night was unpropitious, it was decided to carry out the arrangements.

The course led along the South Deeside road as far as the Bridge of Ess, and on every hand were seen traces of the improvements carried out by the late Sir William Cunliffe Brooks of Glentanner, showing a strange combination of eccentricity, wisdom, and artistic taste. The fading light was just sufficient to show the exceeding grandeur of the view from the bridge. The Tanner, rushing over its rocky bed; the richly wooded banks rising sheer out of the river and sloping away in terraces upwards to the hills, till in the gathering gloom they seemed to lose themselves in the clouds; and the square tower, mantled with ivy, silhouetted against the sky, combined to form a picture rarely equalled and, once seen, never to be forgotten. Passing through the "Golden Gates" which guard the entrance to the glen, the party bowled along a splendid road and soon reached the Mansion House, but the darkness prevented them from realising the wonderful beauty around, which a later visit revealed. Beyond the lakes, a closely-wooded avenue leads up the glen for several miles. The sound of the rushing waters told of the proximity of the Tanner, while now and again a partial clearance of the trees showed, against the sky, the beetling crags bounding in the narrow glen. In the upper

reaches the trees disappeared, and, though the road became rough and soft, it was possible to cycle with safety as far as Bridge of Etnach. Farther on, seven miles above Glentanner House, at the ruins of the farm steading of Coirebhruach, a finger-post marks the commencement of the footpath to Brechin, which leads over the shoulder of Mount Keen.

Under ordinary circumstances, the bicycles would have been left at the Shiel, near Coirebhruach, where the driving road ends, but, as the intention was to return by Glen Mark, they were taken up the hill. The footpath crosses the Tanner here by a single plank, and, as the machines were carried across, the memory of a similar crossing of the Eidart in Glen Feshie was very vivid to some there. On that occasion the frail plank gave way, and precipitated two of the party, cycles and all, into the rushing, boiling river, full to the banks with the melting of the snows, a plunge that nearly cost them their lives. But this time they safely "walked the plank", and commenced the ascent of the hill. The clouds had now dispersed, and the hopes of a clear sunrise considerably increased. It was still dark enough, however, to make the task of finding the path and of carrying the machines up the first steep rise a sufficiently difficult one; but, after the plateau was reached, from which the central cone of the hill rises, the work was comparatively easy. The chief difficulty was the disposal of the cycles so that they might easily be found again, should they be hidden by the fog—a very likely contingency. After due consideration, they were left near a cairn almost due south of the summit, and from that point the ascent of the cone was made.

At 2 a.m., when the top was reached, it was light enough to give a general idea of the surroundings, but the cold was intense, and a westerly wind was blowing so strongly that the slight shelter afforded by the Cairn at the summit was gladly taken advantage of.

To the west, Lochnagar and the Cairngorms were completely hidden in a pall of inky blackness, but, in every other quarter the horizon was clear, although the sky

generally was again overcast. The reflection of the grey morning light on Lochs Kinnord, Davan, and Aboyne showed their positions, and they served as landmarks for identifying the various hill-tops now becoming visible.

Ben Rinnes was hidden behind Morven, but The Buck of the Cabrach, the Tap o' Noth, Knock, and Ben-nachie stood out sharp and clear; and the coast-line, from near Fraserburgh to Aberdeen, could be distinctly traced. Glimpses of the sea near Montrose, and again to the south of Arbroath, brightened up the southern view, and the flashes of the Bell Rock Lighthouse had been specially interesting during the darkness of the early morn. The nearer Forfarshire hills were well seen, and, in the distance, the rugged outline of Beinn a' Ghlo closed in the view to the west, where the thick pall still rested.

As the time of sunrise approached, the colouring on the hills to the north attracted attention—shade after shade of brilliant colours chasing one another in quick succession down the hillsides. This was most strongly marked on Sgarsoch and the Coull hills, the brightness of which formed a striking contrast to the wild and threatening aspect of Morven and the Eastern Cairngorms.

Clouds of fog were now driving across from the direction of Beinn a' Bhuid, and it seemed as if the sunrise was after all to be obscured, and another added to a somewhat long list of disappointments. As the wind struck the hill on the west, the fog formed in heavy clouds which rolled up and completely enshrouded the summit. But as fast as they formed on the west they were torn to pieces on the east by the fury of the wind. Oftentimes the fog seemed to conquer, and the hopes of a clear sunrise disappear. Yet the grandeur of that great fight would have amply repaid the trouble of the ascent.

A few minutes before sunrise, however, the fog cleared away and showed the whole heavens one grand expanse of blue. Immediately, all were entranced by the vision of the orb of fire, as it rose beyond the sea and bathed the whole landscape in a flood of golden light. Turning away, with difficulty, from the glimmering sheen on the water,

the unusual sharpness of the shadows thrown by the hills commanded attention. From the top of the Cairn, the shadow of Mount Keen could be traced as a huge isosceles triangle lying across the Capel Mounth, with the apex resting on Beinn a' Ghlo. At this time a thin filmy cloud formed and remained about fifty yards off to the southwest, and an exhibition of the "Spectres of the Brocken" still further rewarded the climbers. Their images were thrown on to this cloud—giant figures, somewhat contorted in form, but clear and distinct. A gentle movement of the cloud seemed to give life and motion to the "spectres". To add to the grandeur of the sight, a complete circle of rainbow light was formed round each figure as the sun rose higher in the heavens. Of necessity each person saw only one halo, that round his own shadow; for, when several people view a rainbow, no two of them see the same one. Each sees a rainbow whose centre lies in a line drawn from the sun and extended through the spectator's eye. So, in this case, while each of the party saw a halo, it was that immediately in front of himself, and encircling his own shadow. The vision lasted about a quarter of an hour, when the cloud dispersed, the "spectres" vanished, and the party were left alone on the hilltop.

The descent was commenced about 4.30 a.m., each one well pleased with the good fortune attending the visit. On reaching the plateau the journey was continued along the hillside and down the "Ladder", a precipitous path, into Glen Mark. The meadow, near which the Ladder Burn enters the Mark, and on which the Queen's Well stands, was crowded with deer, chiefly stags. On the approach of the party, they crossed the Mark and climbed up the almost perpendicular and lofty crag on the opposite side, where, to the ordinary eye, no foothold was possible.

After visiting Lochlee, Tarfside, Gannochy Bridge, and Fettercairn, the Grampians were again crossed at Cairn o' Mount, and Aboyne was reached in the afternoon, at the conclusion of a very successful and enjoyable expedition.