



Photo by

LOCHNAGAR FROM THE COYLES OF MUICK.

William Ross.

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A SUNRISE FROM LOCHNAGAR.

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MONDAY, 20th July, 1914.—The adventure begins with a sunset in Glen Derry. A group of ten, of "both kinds," * and aged from fifteen years to four times fifteen, seated on a green bank under forest firs, watch the western light flame red on bole and branch.

Restless youth longs to salute the rising sun from Lochnagar; and after some shaking of older heads in prospect of a night "in the furth," wins consent—if it keeps fair.

Braemar, Tuesday, 21st July.—This morning, clouds have gathered and banked up in the west, threatening thunder. Mid-day hears distant mutterings and rumblings, from beyond Ben-a-Bhuird. . . . A rattling peal, away by Lochnagar, challenges the resolution of yester-e'en; but no rain has come. Towards evening, it is still dry, and the clouds over the Prince's Cairn

* The phrase is borrowed from the following conversation once overheard by the writer :—

"Hae ye ony bairns?"

"Ay; some."

"Lads or lasses?"

"Baith kin's."

break into more open order ; so, for better or for worse, we set out ; and by eight o'clock, at the foot of Loch Callater, we strike the hill-track.

The exhilaration of climbing is on us ; soon we are high above the steel-grey loch, and anxiously scan the farther western sky. It has not cleared quite as we had hoped it would ; but not until the treacherous hollow between Creag-an-loch and Cairn Taggart is crossed does an ominous darkness warn us. The track winds up the bared granite shoulder of Cairn Taggart, rubbed smooth and strewn with boulders, among which the guide-cairns—blessings on the builders!—loom uncertain of size, for the dreaded mist has fallen, and we toil warily from cairn to cairn through the waxing and waning gloom, in a steamy, stifling air.

Suddenly the veil is rent : from high heaven hangs a sweeping curtain of white mist ; and as our eyes are drawn west over the mysterious depths of Loch Kander, the distant landscape stretches out wearily in the evening light ; the sky is amber and rose, dulled over with grey ; regretful, sullied a little, as if on the face of the dying day there lingers a trace of the disturbed spirit of its noon.

In this subdued afterglow, now grown more opalescent, keen eyes can just distinguish on the slopes below two or three deer—then more and yet more of them. So quiet are they, so like the land, that we might easily have passed by unaware of them : not they of us ; for, see ! they are silently shifting their ground, and have disappeared. Our Indian file turns away from the south-west, and in the grey dusk descends towards the upper end of the great hollow lying in front of the White Mounth. "Rimming the rock-row" against the last light of fading day, another herd decorates with an exquisite rhythm and grace the austere mountain-line. These are to windward, and shew no sign of

being observed ; shý nomads of this remote high-lifted region.

Crossing the mountain-burn that hurries down to the Dubh Loch, by ten o'clock we reach our resting-place for the night. What a mighty earth-work is this, of which we try in the twilight to fathom the significance: scooped from left to right in sweeping curves ; swinging with a swift tense line from behind, down and down in front ; shelving in plane after plane, as it descends to the black mouth of that long deep rock-gorge, which is filled with dense white vapour, fuming and struggling over the invisible loch ! How big and elemental, and strange it is ! A great landscape, most powerfully and wonderfully made, sublime in scale and simplicity, and very subtle and beautiful in its shaping. It is a great "space-composition" too ; for one can think of the space—the airy void—rather than of the solid rock-basin, ground down slowly and with irresistible force by ice that once filled and flushed the void. The longer one muses in the stillness, the deeper is the impression of such a scene. No human habitation is within eye-shot—no cottage window to shed a ray of kindly light into the mirk. Cut off from the world of every-day, we begin to see visions and dream dreams. Low in the south-eastern sky, over Glen Clova, the planet Jupiter hangs as a lamp, in serene and solitary state ; the sky takes by contrast a dark sapphire hue ; the earth is darker still, a deeper sapphire. The Broad Cairn, Fafernie, and the rest have shrunk in the darkness, and gone to sleep. Far down in the hollow, among the moss hags, in some speck of still water, the star is mirrored. The wonder of two stars equal in radiance, one above, the other below, brightens for a brief space our strange forenigh.

The night mists creep down from the north-west,

blotting out the stars; and it grows chill and eerie. We can well believe that our primeval forefathers were fire-worshippers. One learns much playing at primitive life, even for one night. On the plea of necessity, a fire is soon built by the "can" of a skilled hand, and becomes the bright hub of a half-wheel of ten grateful recumbent radiating figures. As the stokers rise to add fresh fuel, their shadows flicker gigantic and spectral on the halo of driving mist that domes over the blazing hearth. . . . Some go to seek a snatch of sleep in solitude, on a stony bed under an overhanging bank; some doze and "dover" by the fire; others wake and watch, and note the half-hours dragging slowly past.

Wednesday, 22nd July.—A change comes over the feeling of the night: a drier, fresher air steals down from the west; it is the breath of a new-born day. The dawn breaks in a faint suggestion of cool grey, very solemn and quiet and surprising. By two o'clock we stand round the embers of last night's fire, breaking our fast. The sun will rise at 3.47; there is no dallying, for everyone means to be on the peak in time.

Clouds cling to the hillsides, but the light increases. Over the level stretch above the north corrie, mist still drifts eastward; but, look! in the grey there is a rift, the suggestion of a blush of rose: it fades, and comes again: then in an instant the mist dissolves, opening to our astonished eyes a far-flung landscape, grave, serious, splendidly sombre, and marvellously clear in the crystalline air: level bars of gold and red pipe a prelude above the northern horizon: it is a wonderful vision of new strength and purity.

The mist drifts round the summit in ragged tatters: and soon the soaring peak stands out clear, dark and

majestic. Pressing on to breast the last rise, all gain, before the hour of sunrise, the battlements of that megalithic tower of Nature's building.

East and north-east the departing clouds of the night sag in billowy ranks, blue-grey and wet ; the land echoes the sky, it too is wet, blue-grey, and billowy. But aloft, and very near us, radiant wisps and thin gleaming veils melt into the ether, through which the light thunders up, surging and throbbing in waves that break on a celestial shore of pearl.

To Thee Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry.

Bennachie, the little sister, noble as Lochnagar herself, calls to us over the sleeping straths. That faint disc to the right of her must surely be the obscured sun, now rolling on the horizon. And there! are the Tap o' Noth, and the Buck, and Benrinnes ; and, in the distance beyond, very far off, in purest clearest air, some sharp blue peaks we cannot hail by name.

The low sun, as its level beams strike the Cairngorms, brings out every crag and corrie, every dip and dimple—the long blue shadows sharply defining and explaining every bit of modelling in the clear morning air. We ourselves are still in the shadow of the receding cloud-bank ; but west and north the land, bathed in brilliant light, is golden-yellow and green of a peculiar radiance : the liquid shadows are sapphire-blue.

But the cold is so benumbing that we must hurry away : nor can the awe-inspiring appeal of the corries stay us, for our capacity for receiving impressions is already full to overflowing.

In the warm rays of the sun the scene of our night-watch re-visited looks forsaken and strange as a last year's nest. . . . Before we come in sight of Loch

Callater, tails of flying showers fleet over Cairn Toul and Ben Muich Dhui, blurring their blue. . . .

Although the day is growing-up, growing like other ordinary days, as our brake rumbles through Castleton, windows not a few are still blank, and the shops are not yet opened. But for one little company of sojourners in Auchindryne *The evening and the morning were the day*, and intervening nights and days have since made of it a Parable and a Prophecy.