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A SUMMER'S NIGHT ON THE HIGH TOPS.

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FOR a month on either side of the longest day there is no darkness on the high hills. For days on end grey vapours may envelop them so that they are hidden from the glens and all the world beneath, but even in the mists at midnight there is a soft twilight, and it is not until the coming of August that this twilight merges into true darkness. In fine summer weather a night spent on the high tops, 4000 feet above sea level, is an experience, even to one who knows the hills well, to live long in the memory.

It was towards eight o'clock one perfect evening, with brilliant sunshine and not a cloud in the sky, that the writer and a companion pitched their small tent at the head of a corrie 3600 feet above the sea, by name Clais Luineag. Much snow still lay in the corrie—indeed, its western side was still white almost as in midwinter, for the snow had been drifted in before many fierce winter gales. Gradually, as the sun dipped westward, these snow-beds lost their dazzling whiteness and were bathed in a soft warm glow. From our tent a wide view stretched away westward. Near us lay the fine forests of Glen Feshie and Gaick, with Ben Alder and its snow-flecked hill behind them, and away beyond that again the long outline of Ben Nevis. Even at this season of

X. D

midsummer this great hill was almost entirely snow-clad, for were its summit but 600 feet higher it would be the home of eternal snows.

As the sun set away behind the hills of the Atlantic seaboard, sixty miles distant, deer, in their feeding, closely approached our tent, and the charm of this summer's night seemed to weave its spell about them, for they were curiously unafraid and paid little heed to us. At midnight—G.M.T.—the corrie was bathed in a soft twilight. Looking north, the sky burned brightly with the sun's afterglow, against which the hill tops seemed black and grim. Towards the western horizon stars twinkled, and southward a pale moon hung in the sky. Gradually the light strengthened, and soon a cock ptarmigan roused himself in the corrie, croaking quietly in the intense stillness of the dawn. On a snow-field were the tracks of a fox, made when the sun still shone,—for now the snow was being bound in the grip of a black frost which had come to the hills with the dawn.

A couple of miles to the north lay Braeriach, 4248 feet above the level of the sea. Here is the birth-place of the Dee, but where it falls in cascades down the precipitous face of the hill the infant stream was still flowing almost entirely beneath great snow-beds which had imprisoned it continuously since late October. Even trout are absent from the uppermost reaches of the Dee, but within two miles of its source they are plentiful, and stray salmon at times press onward until they have reached a point of the stream where it is a full 2000 feet above sea level. Immediately beneath us the ground dropped away almost sheer to the glen of the Garbhchoire. More than anywhere on the whole Cairngorm range does the snow lie here—indeed, the corrie has never, within living memory, been entirely free of snow, even during the hottest summer.

As we stood on the ridge above the corrie, the rising sun, appearing from the plateau of Cairngorm near where Lochan Buidhe gives drink to the stags when

they feed on the high ground in fine summer weather, shone on the eternal snows of the Garbhchoire, so that from a cold greyish-white they were transformed by a pale rose-tinted light. And with the sun there came to the corries and glens a soft white mist which, at first no bigger than a man's hand, gradually and imperceptibly grew until the whole world beneath us was shut out, and only the hill tops were clear. As the sun rose and one looked across the mist-sea to the east, the sun's reflection on the clouds was almost dazzling, and we thought that the mists would soon be dispelled. But no! It was not till past mid-day that the sun obtained the mastery, and for an hour or two before then the clouds reached even the highest tops so that they were enveloped in cold damp vapours.

On a morning such as this the birds of the high tops revel in the joy of life. Ptarmigan, with half-grown chicks around them; sun themselves amongst the rocks. The snow-bunting hunts for insects where they have fallen, numbed, on the surface of some snow-field, or else amuses himself by running across the snow with head lowered and half-submerged beneath the icy surface. The king of the hills, the golden eagle, is wont, on a morning such as this, to perch on the summit of the highest hill, where he is warmed by the rays of the rising sun, and where he can survey glen and corrie in undisturbed security.

Summer may be short on the high tops, but while she lingers there it is good to commune with the Spirit of the Hills, and to taste of the pure joys that are given to the lover of Nature in her grandest and most noble form.