

## WINTER ADVENTURE.

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HERE is no defence of solitary wandering in the Cairngorms. It is merely the tale of an adventure whose recalling is solace for a climber turned by war to sailor in the tropics, reminding him of the joys of winter. Perhaps, too, it will interest fellow-lovers of those hills.

The adventure befell one January afternoon—1943 it was. A day for climbing! I was striding eagerly over the slopes of Allt a' Ghlaschoire towards the corrie in Lochnagar, that great amphitheatre of cliffs defending the mountain on its eastern side. Iron-hard snow glittered in sunlight and crunched firmly underfoot; the air was still and crystal clear, exhilarating; the sun so warm that even shirt and singlet had been relegated to the rucksack. Behind the pale blue of the shadowed snow-covered corrie hung a wisp of brilliant white cloud. I stopped to capture it on colour film. It was going to be a grand day for the camera, warm perhaps, but full of the loveliness of sunlit snow and ice.

Twenty minutes later I had reached the little frozen "Loch of the Goats." Only twenty minutes. And yet that tiny wisp of cloud was no longer innocent, but threatening, for it had settled on the summit and, most ominously, had begun to flow down the mountain. Not now bare shoulders to the sun, but warm shirt and sweaters and, yes, two wind-jackets, and helmeted head thrust against a fierce wind that was driving hissing, stinging powder-snow through every cranny of clothing. By the time I had pushed my way across the loch, stealthy mist had reached the foot of the precipices. No light for the photographer. I spent some time admiring green ice-falls and had just with resignation turned for home, when suddenly I caught my breath, Far above the earth, up in the grey cloud, blazed a brilliant white flame. A



frozen pinnacle of the Western Gully had reached out momentarily to the sun. Then its flame was quenched. But the challenge remained and up I went, kicking and hewing steps in the steep snow of the Black Spout. It mattered not that I was alone in this immense and terrible place. Every energy was absorbed in the immediate task of advancing up this doubtful breach in the mountain's defences and I utterly forgot the threat and gloom and disappointment of the cloud. The battle was the thing and mere physical conquest sufficient reward.

Higher and higher. Thinnings of the cloud began to reveal, and perhaps to exaggerate, the tremendous nature of the icy ramparts of this mountain. I was glad of the shelter and the slender moral comfort of the gully. And it was yielding! What more could be desired? Then, as I achieved the corrie's rim, there was added a further experience. I had reached the upper surface of the cloud. Higher billows of mist were still hiding the sun, but the wind had almost ceased. It was a strange scene, dimly lit, eerily quiet. I stood on ice-encrusted rocks at the edge of the precipice, for it was only here that the mountain was free of cloud, and looked southwards to see, not hills, but a blanket of cloud, flowing soundlessly and endlessly up and over Cuidhe Crom and pouring steadily down its eastern side—to vanish in thin air. Farther away were peaks of cotton wool flung up by the underlying masses of Mount Battock and Mount Keen. And this white sea, forming ceaselessly at one end, vanishing at the other, always moving onwards, yet always in the same position—it was being made plain before my eyes exactly why it should behave in this mysterious way. I was the awed and privileged spectator of secrets of wind and cloud.

And then I turned northwards and cried out at the sudden glory. For there, piercing the gloom of the cloud, was the sunlit summit of Lochnagar—an airy peak, floating, divorced from the earth. "Beauty in the lap of terror?"—beauty rising above terror. With wind for guide I plunged into the sightless mist and climbed upwards, my heart pounding with exertion and excitement. Sure enough, out I came into bright sunshine. Light is life!—it was like being reborn.



The summit boulders were wonderful and lovely to behold, with fantastic encrustation of wind-built snow-flowers, cream-coloured in the sinking sun, violet in the shadows. A flock of sleeping trolls from a northern legend. Here in this land above the clouds everything was fabulous and legendary. But that did not prepare me for the vision and I was shattered by it. A strange appearance, a ghost : it was a spectre of the Brocken, haloed in rainbow hues : it was a glorious ghost. But ere I could compose my mind to the precision of thought required for a good picture, it had vanished. I was left alone in this strange land, watching familiar peaks break unfamiliarly through the clouds, alone in a remote and desolate and darkening world.

