

TRANSFORMATION.

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EVERYWHERE mist. Still, gloomy masses of it; tall, orange-tipped columns of it; solid grey walls of it. Its base could be seen creeping amongst the trees on the mountainside, but above the base nothing to break its grey-black monotony, except an occasional suggestion of orange light where the sun tried to pierce through some part of it, thinned by the slightest of breezes.

An eerie, oppressive dampness filled the valley. Drip, drip, from the motionless trees; tiny runnels of water crossing the path; a curious, heavy smell of wet earth, wet rock and sodden vegetation. Below, the dull roar of the swollen torrent sounded muffled, but louder even than usual; the mist seemed to act as a kind of sounding-board which exaggerated, but at the same time blurred its voice. The precipitous sides of the valley glistened dully above the torrent; a bird screeched suddenly and flew across, startling by its sudden sharp voice breaking into the even roar of the river. The yellow waves lifted and scattered their foam amongst the rocks 500 feet below; driftwood was piled up against the larger boulders, or tumbled helpless before the surge of rushing water.

The heavy oppression made us sleepy; walking was almost an effort. The world would suddenly be reduced to a few yards around, as we climbed higher into the mist, only to return as it had vanished when the track led downwards. The track seemed endless, the mist everlasting. . . .

Then in an instant, unbelievably, we walked out of it, into the sunshine.

We looked back, then to the right and to the left—everywhere grey-black cloud. But before us a wide sweep of valley, tree-clad and boulder-strewn, was terminated abruptly by a colossal star-shaped mountain which looked, indeed, like a star fallen from heaven, with its lowest point buried deep in the earth. The thrill of this sudden appearance

was almost ecstatic; we stopped dead in our tracks, gaping at it. The sun was shining in a cloud-swept sky; the trees and flower-strewn alps were a vivid green, and bright after the recent rain; near a mountain hut at the end of the valley, a peasant yodelled as he watched his flock of goats. And towering above this peaceful scene was the mountain—4,000 feet of precipitous rock, split almost from summit to base by a huge gash, down which tumbled the thin ribbon of a waterfall. On either side of the main peak projected two smaller points—two lateral points of the star which had fallen to earth. Its impressiveness was tremendous; no words came to our lips for none were adequate to express what we felt.

At length we again moved forward along the track, which led up the valley and ended at the hut. Here we were to spend the night before setting out to make our ascent of the mountain. The joy of anticipation, or the joy of realisation; which would be the greater? To-morrow we should learn.