

CHAPTER XIV. A SUNRISE

A MONTH after this, on the evening of the 20th of August, Simon Ford and Madge took leave, with all manner of good wishes, of four tourists, who were setting forth from the cottage.

James Starr, Harry, and Jack Ryan were about to lead Nell's steps over yet untrodden paths, and to show her the glories of nature by a light to which she was as yet a stranger. The excursion was to last for two days. James Starr, as well as Harry, considered that during these eight and forty hours spent above ground, the maiden would be able to see everything of which she must have remained ignorant in the gloomy pit; all the varied aspects of the globe, towns, plains, mountains, rivers, lakes, gulfs, and seas would pass, panorama-like, before her eyes.

In that part of Scotland lying between Edinburgh and Glasgow, nature would seem to have collected and set forth specimens of every one of these terrestrial beauties. As to the heavens, they would be spread abroad as over the whole earth, with their changeful clouds, serene or veiled moon, their radiant sun, and clustering stars. The expedition had been planned so as to combine a view of all these things.

Simon and Madge would have been glad to go with Nell; but they never left their cottage willingly, and could not make up their minds to quit their subterranean home for a single day.

James Starr went as an observer and philosopher, curious to note, from a psychological point of view, the novel impressions made upon Nell; perhaps also with some hope of detecting a clue to the mysterious events connected with her childhood. Harry, with a little trepidation, asked himself whether it was not possible that this rapid initiation into the things of the exterior world would change the maiden he had known and loved hitherto into quite a different girl. As for Jack Ryan, he was as joyous as a lark rising in the first beams of the sun. He only trusted that his gayety would prove contagious, and enliven his traveling companions, thus rewarding them for letting him join them. Nell was pensive and silent.

James Starr had decided, very sensibly, to set off in the evening. It would be very much better for the girl to pass gradually from the darkness of night to the full light of day; and that would in this way be managed, since between midnight and noon she would experience the successive phases of shade and sunshine, to which her sight had to get accustomed.

Just as they left the cottage, Nell took Harry's hand saying, "Harry, is it really necessary for me to leave the mine at all, even for these few days?"

"Yes, it is, Nell," replied the young man. "It is needful for both of us."

"But, Harry," resumed Nell, "ever since you found me, I have been as happy as I can possibly be. You have been teaching me. Why is that not enough? What am I going up there for?"

Harry looked at her in silence. Nell was giving utterance to nearly his own thoughts.

"My child," said James Starr, "I can well understand the hesitation you feel; but it will be good for you to go with us. Those who love you are taking you, and they will bring you back again. Afterwards you will be free, if you wish it, to continue your life in the coal mine, like old Simon, and Madge, and Harry. But at least you ought to be able to compare what you give up with what you choose, then decide freely. Come!"

"Come, dear Nell!" cried Harry.

"Harry, I am willing to follow you," replied the maiden. At nine o'clock the last train through the tunnel started to convey Nell and her companions to the surface of the earth. Twenty minutes later they alighted on the platform where the branch line to New Aberfoyle joins the railway from Dumbarton to Stirling.

The night was already dark. From the horizon to the zenith, light vapory clouds hurried through the upper air, driven by a refreshing

northwesterly breeze. The day had been lovely; the night promised to be so likewise.

On reaching Stirling, Nell and her friends, quitting the train, left the station immediately. Just before them, between high trees, they could see a road which led to the banks of the river Forth.

The first physical impression on the girl was the purity of the air inhaled eagerly by her lungs.

"Breathe it freely, Nell," said James Starr; "it is fragrant with all the scents of the open country."

"What is all that smoke passing over our heads?" inquired Nell.

"Those are clouds," answered Harry, "blown along by the westerly wind."

"Ah!" said Nell, "how I should like to feel myself carried along in that silent whirl! And what are those shining sparks which glance here and there between rents in the clouds?"

"Those are the stars I have told you about, Nell. So many suns they are, so many centers of worlds like our own, most likely."

The constellations became more clearly visible as the wind cleared the clouds from the deep blue of the firmament. Nell gazed upon the myriad

stars which sparkled overhead. "But how is it," she said at length, "that if these are suns, my eyes can endure their brightness?"

"My child," replied James Starr, "they are indeed suns, but suns at an enormous distance. The nearest of these millions of stars, whose rays can reach us, is Vega, that star in Lyra which you observe near the zenith, and that is fifty thousand millions of leagues distant. Its brightness, therefore, cannot affect your vision. But our own sun, which will rise to-morrow, is only distant thirty-eight millions of leagues, and no human eye can gaze fixedly upon that, for it is brighter than the blaze of any furnace. But come, Nell, come!"

They pursued their way, James Starr leading the maiden, Harry walking by her side, while Jack Ryan roamed about like a young dog, impatient of the slow pace of his masters. The road was lonely. Nell kept looking at the great trees, whose branches, waving in the wind, made them seem to her like giants gesticulating wildly. The sound of the breeze in the tree-tops, the deep silence during a lull, the distant line of the horizon, which could be discerned when the road passed over open levels--all these things filled her with new sensations, and left lasting impressions on her mind.

After some time she ceased to ask questions, and her companions respected her silence, not wishing to influence by any words of theirs the girl's highly sensitive imagination, but preferring to allow ideas to arise spontaneously in her soul.

At about half past eleven o'clock, they gained the banks of the river Forth. There a boat, chartered by James Starr, awaited them. In a few hours it would convey them all to Granton. Nell looked at the clear water which flowed up to her feet, as the waves broke gently on the beach, reflecting the starlight. "Is this a lake?" said she.

"No," replied Harry, "it is a great river flowing towards the sea, and soon opening so widely as to resemble a gulf. Taste a little of the water in the hollow of your hand, Nell, and you will perceive that it is not sweet like the waters of Lake Malcolm."

The maiden bent towards the stream, and, raising a little water to her lips, "This is quite salt," said she.

"Yes, the tide is full; the sea water flows up the river as far as this," answered Harry.

"Oh, Harry! Harry!" exclaimed the maiden, "what can that red glow on the horizon be? Is it a forest on fire?"

"No, it is the rising moon, Nell."

"To be sure, that's the moon," cried Jack Ryan, "a fine big silver plate, which the spirits of air hand round and round the sky to collect the stars in, like money."

"Why, Jack," said the engineer, laughing, "I had no idea you could strike out such bold comparisons!"

"Well, but, Mr. Starr, it is a just comparison. Don't you see the stars disappear as the moon passes on? so I suppose they drop into it."

"What you mean to say, Jack, is that the superior brilliancy of the moon eclipses that of stars of the sixth magnitude, therefore they vanish as she approaches."

"How beautiful all this is!" repeated Nell again and again, with her whole soul in her eyes. "But I thought the moon was round?"

"So she is, when 'full,'" said James Starr; "that means when she is just opposite to the sun. But to-night the moon is in the last quarter, shorn of her just proportions, and friend Jack's grand silver plate looks more like a barber's basin."

"Oh, Mr. Starr, what a base comparison!" he exclaimed, "I was just going to begin a sonnet to the moon, but your barber's basin has destroyed all chance of an inspiration."

Gradually the moon ascended the heavens. Before her light the lingering clouds fled away, while stars still sparkled in the west, beyond the influence of her radiance. Nell gazed in silence on the glorious

spectacle. The soft silvery light was pleasant to her eyes, and her little trembling hand expressed to Harry, who clasped it, how deeply she was affected by the scene.

"Let us embark now," said James Starr. "We have to get to the top of Arthur's Seat before sunrise."

The boat was moored to a post on the bank. A boatman awaited them. Nell and her friends took their seats; the sail was spread; it quickly filled before the northwesterly breeze, and they sped on their way.

What a new sensation was this for the maiden! She had been rowed on the waters of Lake Malcolm; but the oar, handled ever so lightly by Harry, always betrayed effort on the part of the oarsman. Now, for the first time, Nell felt herself borne along with a gliding movement, like that of a balloon through the air. The water was smooth as a lake, and Nell reclined in the stern of the boat, enjoying its gentle rocking. Occasionally the effect of the moonlight on the waters was as though the boat sailed across a glittering silver field. Little wavelets rippled along the banks. It was enchanting.

At length Nell was overcome with drowsiness, her eyelids drooped, her head sank on Harry's shoulder--she slept. Harry, sorry that she should miss any of the beauties of this magnificent night, would have aroused her.

"Let her sleep!" said the engineer. "She will better enjoy the novelties of the day after a couple of hours' rest."

At two o'clock in the morning the boat reached Granton pier. Nell awoke. "Have I been asleep?" inquired she.

"No, my child," said James Starr. "You have been dreaming that you slept, that's all."

The night continued clear. The moon, riding in mid-heaven, diffused her rays on all sides. In the little port of Granton lay two or three fishing boats; they rocked gently on the waters of the Firth. The wind fell as the dawn approached. The atmosphere, clear of mists, promised one of those fine autumn days so delicious on the sea coast.

A soft, transparent film of vapor lay along the horizon; the first sunbeam would dissipate it; to the maiden it exhibited that aspect of the sea which seems to blend it with the sky. Her view was now enlarged, without producing the impression of the boundless infinity of ocean.

Harry taking Nell's hand, they followed James Starr and Jack Ryan as they traversed the deserted streets. To Nell, this suburb of the capital appeared only a collection of gloomy dark houses, just like Coal Town, only that the roof was higher, and gleamed with small lights.

She stepped lightly forward, and easily kept pace with Harry. "Are you

not tired, Nell?" asked he, after half an hour's walking.

"No! my feet seem scarcely to touch the earth," returned she. "This sky above us seems so high up, I feel as if I could take wing and fly!"

"I say! keep hold of her!" cried Jack Ryan. "Our little Nell is too good to lose. I feel just as you describe though, myself, when I have not left the pit for a long time."

"It is when we no longer experience the oppressive effect of the vaulted rocky roof above Coal Town," said James Starr, "that the spacious firmament appears to us like a profound abyss into which we have, as it were, a desire to plunge. Is that what you feel, Nell?"

"Yes, Mr. Starr, it is exactly like that," said Nell. "It makes me feel giddy."

"Ah! you will soon get over that, Nell," said Harry. "You will get used to the outer world, and most likely forget all about our dark coal pit."

"No, Harry, never!" said Nell, and she put her hand over her eyes, as though she would recall the remembrance of everything she had lately quitted.

Between the silent dwellings of the city, the party passed along Leith Walk, and went round the Calton Hill, where stood, in the light of the

gray dawn, the buildings of the Observatory and Nelson's Monument. By Regent's Bridge and the North Bridge they at last reached the lower extremity of the Canongate. The town still lay wrapt in slumber.

Nell pointed to a large building in the center of an open space, asking, "What great confused mass is that?"

"That confused mass, Nell, is the palace of the ancient kings of Scotland; that is Holyrood, where many a sad scene has been enacted! The historian can here invoke many a royal shade; from those of the early Scottish kings to that of the unhappy Mary Stuart, and the French king, Charles X. When day breaks, however, Nell, this palace will not look so very gloomy. Holyrood, with its four embattled towers, is not unlike some handsome country house. But let us pursue our way. There, just above the ancient Abbey of Holyrood, are the superb cliffs called Salisbury Crags. Arthur's Seat rises above them, and that is where we are going. From the summit of Arthur's Seat, Nell, your eyes shall behold the sun appear above the horizon seaward."

They entered the King's Park, then, gradually ascending they passed across the Queen's Drive, a splendid carriageway encircling the hill, which we owe to a few lines in one of Sir Walter Scott's romances.

Arthur's Seat is in truth only a hill, seven hundred and fifty feet high, which stands alone amid surrounding heights. In less than half an hour, by an easy winding path, James Starr and his party reached the

crest of the crouching lion, which, seen from the west, Arthur's Seat so much resembles. There, all four seated themselves; and James Starr, ever ready with quotations from the great Scottish novelist, simply said, "Listen to what is written by Sir Walter Scott in the eighth chapter of the Heart of Mid-Lothian. 'If I were to choose a spot from which the rising or setting sun could be seen to the greatest possible advantage, it would be from this neighborhood.' Now watch, Nell! the sun will soon appear, and for the first time you will contemplate its splendor."

The maiden turned her eyes eastward. Harry, keeping close beside her, observed her with anxious interest. Would the first beams of day overpower her feelings? All remained quiet, even Jack Ryan. A faint streak of pale rose tinted the light vapors of the horizon. It was the first ray of light attacking the laggards of the night. Beneath the hill lay the silent city, massed confusedly in the twilight of dawn. Here and there lights twinkled among the houses of the old town. Westward rose many hill-tops, soon to be illuminated by tips of fire.

Now the distant horizon of the sea became more plainly visible. The scale of colors fell into the order of the solar. Every instant they increased in intensity, rose color became red, red became fiery, daylight dawned. Nell now glanced towards the city, of which the outlines became more distinct. Lofty monuments, slender steeples emerged from the gloom; a kind of ashy light was spread abroad. At length one solitary ray struck on the maiden's sight. It was that ray of green which, morning or evening, is reflected upwards from the sea when the

horizon is clear.

An instant afterwards, Nell turned, and pointing towards a bright prominent point in the New Town, "Fire!" cried she.

"No, Nell, that is no fire," said Harry. "The sun has touched with gold the top of Sir Walter Scott's monument"--and, indeed, the extreme point of the monument blazed like the light of a pharos.

It was day--the sun arose--his disc seemed to glitter as though he indeed emerged from the waters of the sea. Appearing at first very large from the effects of refraction, he contracted as he rose and assumed the perfectly circular form. Soon no eye could endure the dazzling splendor; it was as though the mouth of a furnace was opened through the sky.

Nell closed her eyes, but her eyelids could not exclude the glare, and she pressed her fingers over them. Harry advised her to turn in the opposite direction. "Oh, no," said she, "my eyes must get used to look at what yours can bear to see!"

Even through her hands Nell perceived a rosy light, which became more white as the sun rose above the horizon. As her sight became accustomed to it, her eyelids were raised, and at length her eyes drank in the light of day.

The good child knelt down, exclaiming, "Oh Lord God! how beautiful is

Thy creation!" Then she rose and looked around. At her feet extended the panorama of Edinburgh--the clear, distinct lines of streets in the New Town, and the irregular mass of houses, with their confused network of streets and lanes, which constitutes Auld Reekie, properly so called. Two heights commanded the entire city; Edinburgh Castle, crowning its huge basaltic rock, and the Calton Hill, bearing on its rounded summit, among other monuments, ruins built to represent those of the Parthenon at Athens.

Fine roadways led in all directions from the capital. To the north, the coast of the noble Firth of Forth was indented by a deep bay, in which could be seen the seaport town of Leith, between which and this Modern Athens of the north ran a street, straight as that leading to the Piraeus.

Beyond the wide Firth could be seen the soft outlines of the county of Fife, while beneath the spectator stretched the yellow sands of Portobello and Newhaven.

Nell could not speak. Her lips murmured a word or two indistinctly; she trembled, became giddy, her strength failed her; overcome by the purity of the air and the sublimity of the scene, she sank fainting into Harry's arms, who, watching her closely, was ready to support her.

The youthful maiden, hitherto entombed in the massive depths of the earth, had now obtained an idea of the universe--of the works both of

God and of man. She had looked upon town and country, and beyond these, into the immensity of the sea, the infinity of the heavens.