

to the eastward; and it was with a feeling that we were leaving a charmed world that we saw the steamer turned on the return journey to Pembroke.

ABOVE THE CLOUDS—MOUNT ASPIRING.

To the dwellers on the plains and in the cities, the clouds present but little variation in shade or forms of beauty. Perhaps at sunrise, flushed by the fiery glow of the dawn, and piled up in gleaming masses of crimson and gold, or at sunset appearing in many hues in the soft, subdued lights of the afterglow, they may bid the beholder pause and wonder. The thunderstorm, too, has an awful grandeur of its own, but far up on the mountain tops, above the clouds, there is the magic world, there is the glory of cloud beauty, a wonderful scene, ever varying, and once seen never to be forgotten. I had been on the slope of Mount Aspiring all night, my companion had elected to visit Gladstone and the Great Rock at Hawea, and when the first light of dawn appeared in the east, I started up the mountain side for the higher slopes. It was a toilsome climb, over great rocks, through drifted snow, but the thought of the enchanted region of cloudland spurred me on. Above me, creeping round the mountain like a living but shapeless form, hung the grey curtain in sombre folds reaching far and wide, and seeming to dare the sacrilegious intruder to venture into its misty embrace. Step by step I toiled up the weary path, and at last passed into the semi-darkness of the cloud-belt—

“Through that strange and silent world,
To the mighty presence led,
While round me thronged the spirits
Of the long since dead.”

Groping for the path, I stumbled blindly on, through the cold, clammy mist, and at last emerged in the clear light above the clouds. Spread out in front as far as the eye could reach, was a vast sea of grey mist, billowing in its great profundity, sometimes rising in mighty columns as

though in wrath; anon, rippling along as softly as the silver wave of a summer sea; then, as though impelled by the agency of a spirit of evil, rising up in weird and ghostly forms. Presently came a soft, sobbing sound like a summer breeze stirring the leaves of a tropical forest, and the first beams of the rising sun shot over the silent sea of mist. The transformation scene had commenced. The vast expanse was no longer grey, but bathed in colours so bizarre, so wonderful, that no description would adequately convey a full conception of its brilliant glory. Waves of cloud arose from the main body, gleaming like silver and gold, the top edges tinted crimson and pink, then noiselessly fell back and faded away. Little cloudlets like birds of passage with gorgeous plumage floated above the rest, casting fleeting shadows over the silent sea of crimson and gold. Then the sun appeared in full glory; the great ocean of cloud reflected the bright light, the deep grey in the centre of the masses gave way to a soft, fleecy white, the pink tinge of the outer edges increased to a fiery glow, and the huge column of mist assumed the appearance of flames of fire tinted with violet and purple. The dull sullen glow in the far east seemed to leap with gladness, and change into a flaming sea of carmine; then, as though gathering strength for a fresh effort, the great expanse became calm and smooth, stretching out in all directions like the surface of a tranquil lake. A slight breeze arose, and instantly, as though obeying some mighty omnipotent will, strange unearthly forms rose from the ocean of cloud. The great masses heaved and tossed in sudden anger; troops of spectral horses fled along the surface; beautiful fountains, besides which the world-famed marble fountains of the Alto Uccello would appear commonplace, spouted forth their silver spray; mighty armies appeared and vanished; splendid cities grew, then faded as instantly away; great masses of dark mist warred with their rainbow-tinted brethren as though the spirits of heaven and the legions of hell fought for the possession of a world; ghastly spectres glided