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The Darkest Hour precedes the Dawn.

I HAVE occasionally seen enquiries as to the truth of this expression, but cannot remember to have read any discussion or explanation of the subject.

Having been out observing on thousands of nights, and often enough "until the dappled dawn" rose, I may, perhaps, be allowed to give an opinion on the matter—and it is certainly in favour of the view stated in the heading to this note. I have frequently been impressed with the intense darkness which comes on before dawn. When a person has been out all night, his eye naturally becomes accustomed to the prevailing conditions; he can discern things with astonishing distinctness, and is familiar with such objects around as are within his range of vision.

Before dawn a greater darkness seems to drop down like a mantle upon the immediate surroundings. Objects which were plainly observable during the previous hours of the night are blotted out, and a nervous feeling is sometimes induced by the dense opacity of the air. I think the unusual darkness only lasts a short time, and that a quick brightening succeeds, but its occurrence is most marked and by no means a rare experience. I have noticed it independently of any previous knowledge, and when such a thing has been far from my thoughts, so it cannot have been a subjective sensation. But I have been out only on clear starry nights.

I regret that I have recorded no observations in detail, and so cannot say the exact interval before sunrise when the remarkable darkness came on, and whether it is common to every night and season and condition of sky. But of its frequent manifestation I can speak with confidence, and possibly there may be some simple explanation of the event, though it does not occur to me at the moment.

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