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## MOUNTAIN SPRITES.

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(Delivered Dec. 10th at the opening meeting of the  
Winter Course, 1907-8.)

As I came into the hall this evening I was asked whether Mountain Sprites were birds, beasts or fishes, or at any rate to which branch of natural history sprites belonged. A sprite the dictionary tells us is a spirit, a shade, an apparition, and I have never yet found in nature anything to which such a title could be quite so appropriately applied as to the very elusive soberly coloured or extremely active butterflies which one finds on the summits of high mountains, where they flit up suddenly from the broken rocks, appear for a second or two and then close their wings and drop into a crevice or over a precipice where pursuit is impossible. Another disconcerting device is to drop suddenly to the ground and feign death, when followed closely, where they lie over sideways among the broken rocks with which such places are strewn, and thus become instantly and most effectually invisible. On the other hand these attractive creatures may come dashing at you out of space as soon as a ray of sunshine warms up the snow fields or rugged rocks, and then as suddenly disappear over a cliff or beyond a pile of rough boulders where pursuit is most difficult.

It may not be amiss to remind you, here, that chasing butterflies in the rarefied atmosphere and among the loose rocks on the bare summits, or on the boulder-strewn slopes of a mountain over 8,000 feet high, is an entirely different proposition from even a long trying chase over level meadows and through the woods of the lowlands. The very fatigue of violent exercise of all kinds at such heights is a factor which constantly forces itself upon one. Added to this any recklessness, accidental stumble or mis-step near the edge of a ravine may easily result in a serious accident, involving perhaps a sudden and involuntary descent of some thousands of feet.