

## LOCHNAGAR IN 1917.

BY ALEXANDER MACDONALD, M.A.

FOUR time-expired descendants of the old fighting race, many of whose ancestors had lived through stirring years of foray and rebellion at Braemar, touched by the finger of passing great events, conspired to make a day's pilgrimage to the nearest cradle of their "forebears" and to crown a long overdue holiday by a last ascent of Lochnagar. The day proved the finest in the end of July—a day of brightness and clear vision, when all the inspirations of scenery and history flowed in upon the mind.

A halt was made at Mains of Monaltrie; and, as we sat and gazed across the valley at the twin corries of Lochnagar and the sky-pointing peak of Cac Carn Beag shooting up betwixt them, it seemed that time had rolled back and fixed itself at the very minute where it had been through childhood's days, and, for all that we then understood, since the world began. There lay the same immovable landscape, every feature of which was as permanent and lovely as a picture, for of all the aspects of Lochnagar none surpasses this. It is neither too distant nor too near, and the fine lineaments of the great mountain are seen to the best advantage. The view is not even surpassed by the remarkably fine view obtained as, after swinging round Glen Gairn at Rinloan, you walk down to Crathienaird and the North Deeside road—a view on which a friend is wont to expatiate. It seems strange that the standard picture should confine itself to the snow-clad spouts above the tarn of the east when such visions of extensive grandeur as those indicated are to be had.

But it was the dread and silent immutability of the scene that made itself felt beyond all other impressions. It brought vividly to mind the great phrase of "the everlasting hills," and persuaded us that there was no

other with a deeper meaning or whose force was more telling at the present time. Change and decay, evolution and renewal, are in all other things; but the hills, like Ossian's sun, are for ever the same.

It is so with all our hills, but the cogency and magnitude of the truth increase when we come into contact with the greater and more noted of our mountains; and, though there may be higher peaks and older bed-rocks, we do not think that any county holds a hill whose name and fame can equal that of Lochnagar. As it was in Byron's day, as it was since the great Ice Age, so it remains—constant in all its factors.

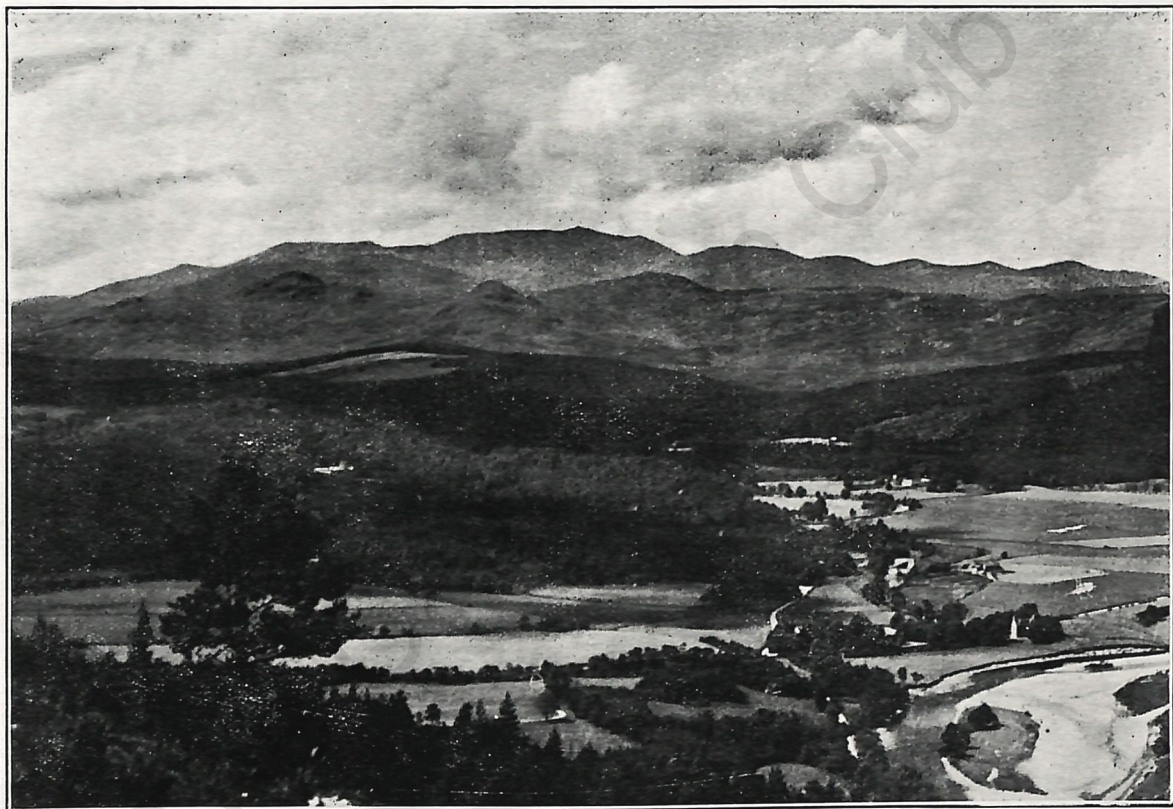
The ancient garment of plants from hillfoot to summit varies only in its seasonal change—the heaths and ferns, the lesser cow-wheat, the club-mosses and the dwarf-willows, the various sedges, and the polytrichum among the topmost rocks, are each at their proper station in spite of winter frost and summer drought, like soldiers on a deathless watch! Not a pocket is empty, not a plant fails to produce seed after its kind.

The insects of the various levels proclaim their everlastingness, even the slightest of them and the most despised. No tiger beetle or hunting spider is awaiting. The screaming swifts that make their nests 4000 feet up in the spouts of the "steep frowning" cliffs are as lively and keen on their work as their forerunners were a hundred thousand years before a round hut was seen in the Dee Valley. The snow-bunting flits away ere you can mark his peculiarities, but you cannot doubt his personality, for no other small bird frequents this alpine wilderness. The red deer on the verge of the plateau continue to browse on the bilberry and sedge-leaves, warily sniffing the breeze every few seconds.

The panorama of Scotland is still the same—the great Cairngorms on the west, the dim and distant Sutherland peaks, and the pointed hills of Aberdeen and Banff. On the east the lesser Grampians stand out in some relief, and the Stone of Clochnaben behind Mount Keen seems almost within touch of a walking stick, while

the smoke on the horizon at the river mouth goes up as of old. Towards the south-east there are broad-backed ranges with terraced ridges that speak of ice-plough and river-fretting, and in chain beyond chain and peak beyond peak rise the mountain-lands of Forfar, Perth, and Argyle. There they lie in an eternity of calm self-assertion, hard as the facts of life and sure as science itself. You may play around them with your poetry and philosophy: they will endure generations and schools of these things unmoved and unaltered. The winds of heaven play around the peaks as they have done since time began. The clouds above show some variation, yet it is but a stage-army deception. Watch them a little and you will resolve them into a few eternal elements. At bottom they are but wind-driven mist, as they were when the morning stars sang together. It is a sight beyond ecstasy: it has delighted every age.

But there was something else to note as the thin line of sexagenarians panted up "the ladder"—grown so much steeper since their last ascent! They made but a poor, broken show. The ranks that used to be crowded with the young and the promising—the flowers of the forest and the hope of the nation—where are they? Will they return in any numbers to nourish in their brain and muscle the forces of the future? Those protagonists of the better days to come, whose playground and training-field these mountains were, are gone, called away by the holiest of summonses to all but certain destruction. They have exchanged the mightier pen for the sword of decision, and have gone back hundreds of years in the march of intellect, laying upon their country's altar the gift of life itself. We miss them on the hillpath. We shall miss them for all the lone years that remain to us. Their country will miss them, but she will never for one hour of all the future forget them—Wallace and Bruce, and the brave young lads of the Great War.



*Photo by*

LOCHNAGAR FROM CRAIGENDARROCH.

*A. J. Wood.*