

SOME WAR-TIME REFLECTIONS.

BY VISCOUNT BRYCE, O.M., D.C.L., ETC.,
PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB.

HEARTY greetings to my fellow-members of the Cairngorm Club and to the *Journal* on the appearance of its Jubilee Number!

Unable to re-visit the Alps in war time, I have this summer been wandering among the mountains of Sutherlandshire and Perthshire, and along the delightful shores of Arran. Hills and glens are silent. All the young men have gone—many never to return. The faces of the women are sad. Seeing few anglers in the rivers, hearing hardly a gun upon the moors, one is reminded of Macaulay's lines about Etruria when Lars Porsena was marching his army on Rome—

Unharm'd the waterfowl may dip
In the Volsinian mere.

One tries among these lovely peaks and along the wave-resounding shores of ocean to forget what is passing in Flanders and France, in Macedonia and Palestine and Mesopotamia. But the contrast between the stillness and beauty of Nature, offering us her peaceful delights, and the flames of strife and hatred that have enwrapt the whole world, destroying the youth of many nations, seems almost as awful here as it does to those in the midst of battle, who have indeed little time to reflect upon it.

In the Highland straths, I have been struck by the improvement in the condition of the people since I first roamed the hills seventy years ago. The cottages are certainly better, and life is less hard. But there is still plenty to be done. Ruined farm houses and deserted crofts still speak of the unhappy days when, in the last century, some of the great landowners sent across

the sea or into the great cities so many of their humbler tenants. It is to be hoped that, following up the change of policy marked by the first Crofters' Commission, efforts will be continued to make more of the country available for human industry and habitation. Large stretches of the lower parts of deer forests might be planted with trees or stocked with sheep; some districts could carry more cattle. After this war is over, we shall need more than ever to develop to the uttermost all our natural resources, and to make Scotland a more attractive place, with a better prospect for the rural population, than it has been latterly for those who have gone far away—to Canada and New Zealand.

Wandering through these straths, and along the now lonely shores of the Western Sea, one thinks of those who have gone to fight to save our country and defend the cause of Right, and of those Canadians and New Zealanders, sons of Scottish emigrants, who have come to join their British cousins on the battlefield. They have been worthy of their sires. Their valour has been as great as when Mackintoshes and Mackays on the North Inch at Perth, Frasers and Macdonalds on the banks of Loch Oich, fought out their clan feuds with one another; and it has been used for a higher purpose.

Never have we had more reason to be proud of Scotland. She has given freely of her best blood for us all—for freedom and a righteous cause. A dear old Aberdeen friend of mine—Dr. Angus Fraser—used to claim that without the sons of the Gael in the Scottish and Irish regiments, there would have been far fewer British victories. We must not disparage the valour of others among our countrymen—of the men of Lancashire and Northumberland, Sussex and Wales, and the London East-Enders too—all have fought well. But certainly there has been no valour more brilliant than that of Scotsmen. We love Scotland more than ever; we love her for her men and their magnificent spirit.

We, mountain-climbers, love her for her beauty also—

and no less in age than in youth. I have been among Alps and Apennines and Pyrenees, in the mountains of Norway and Hungary and Greece, in the Caucasus and the Rocky Mountains, the Andes and the Himalaya; but the landscapes of Scotland are no less grand and lovely to me now than they were seventy years ago. It is not size that gives perfectness of charm to a landscape, but variety of form, nobility of line, richness and depth of colour. We who delight in the mountains may say with Wordsworth to the end of our lives—

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.

20th September, 1917.