

## BEN MORE IN LATE SEPTEMBER.

By ANDREW HURRY.

THERE was quietness and coolness on the hill-top. Purple and blood-red faded slowly in the sky. The clouds became grey and silver; the great spaces beyond them were clear as spring water. On the hillside the curlew's eerie cry and an occasional "Gur, wack, wack" of the grouse broke into the sound of the whispering breeze as it slightly waved the sun-scorched heather, making an eerie, soft whistling rustle and silently disappearing into the great spaces of the hillsides.

On every side of Ben More there is a tumultuous ocean of peaks, tossing with light and shade, glistening in silver and gold, torn with black scree, the purples of the rock precipices and the deep cobalt and bronze of the mountain valleys with no memories and no signs of any human occupancy at all leaving a lasting impression on me. Here and there a fertile valley, a silent river softly flowing and twining seawards. As one stands on this rocky vantage point and sees this mountainous world, man does not count; one does not think of him, it is the actual presence of these mighty forms that engrosses one's whole attention.

A look round this airy peak and I see away to the north Scotland's Roof, Ben Nevis, standing and shining above me, but from this view-point he is a massive sentinel, sparkling with his first shimmer of snow. Braeriach, Cairntoul, Angel Peak and Ben Macdhuì (all over 4,000 feet) are solitary and supreme. Schiehallion's proud top peeps past the side of Ben Lawers whose sharp rugged tops are reflected in Loch Tay. Eastward, the

view is fine and to my astonishment I could clearly see the Wallace Monument dominating the Forth, and the sun's rays glistening on its smooth surface. Ben Ledi and Ben Venue raised their proud heads through a frieze of fluffy clouds.

Southward, the chimney stacks and University Tower of Glasgow were slightly veiled in a haze, but occasionally a shaft of sunlight penetrated the smoke of the Second City and was reflected on some glass roofs.

Down the Clyde Valley, Ailsa Craig is visible and I can see the Paps of Jura topping the haze. Nearer hand Ben Lomond's summit shone and dominated the Loch Lomond range. The Loch itself is not seen from Ben More as a range of hills comes in between it and the "bonnie, bonnie banks." Westwards is a medley of mountains with no outstanding peak, but shining in the morning light, some clouded in golden white, blue white, and dead white, and these clouds floated away into the blue sky. Northwards, Ben Cruachan stands in splendour among the Loch Awe range. His head is snow-sprinkled and his sides sharply precipitous.

A little to the left of Ben Cruachan is one of 1926's tragedy mountains, Achallader. A young mountaineer slipped on the winter's ice of the mountain and was lost and found dead after many days' search. This peak in the winter is a glittering confusion of miniature glaciers and greenish ice fields, of smooth light, with dingy rock-piles, dull and cold, a tatterdemalion of desolation. Up there winter generally rules for five months of the year and the snow puts all to sleep, where in late September the face of things may in one single night turn white and the clouds consort, the winds wed, and sudden and terrible snow-storms are brought forth full grown.

Stobinian, another tragedy hill, is at my feet and is attached to Ben More by a grassy neck of land. It was the scene of a great lightning storm this summer when a young lady, daughter of an old Fifeshire family, was struck by the lightning and killed on the spot.

As I retrace my steps down the steep sides of the Ben,

towards Loch Dochart, the loch appears to be sunk within a crumpled cushion of tawny coloured silk. An old castle standing on a small rocky promontory at one of the narrow parts of the loch, reminds me of historical days, and hoary memories crowd in upon me as this ancient pile is viewed.

The waters of the loch lay before me without a ripple and the hills were reflected in the liquid mirror, the birches were a dream, thousands of silver barked stems gleaming against the thick carpet of half-withered golden grasses and russet bracken. Far away winds the river Dochart right into the tawny bosom of the glen, sparkling and splashing over its rocky bed, past the beautiful, historical thatched houses of Killin then gently snuggling into the placid waters of Loch Tay. How splendid it is to see afar, space dwarfing space and vistas of wondrous colours! No wonder artists fail adequately to paint mountains. The toiling millions in crowded cities are ignorant of the terrible beauty and sublimity of our own mountains. If they could only see the boundless open of the hills, and realise what the freedom of eagles means, and see the wintry sunlight when the great hills are a golden yellow with splashes of sparkling snow in the corries, or when they had learned to suffer the clouds on the hill-top, they would then be able to thank God for the sunshine.

Something of the lure of the hills is expressed in the following poem by Leigh Buckner Hanes :—

God give me mountains,  
With hills at their knees,  
Mountains too high  
For the flutter of trees.

Mountains that know  
The dark valleys of death,  
That have kissed a pale star  
And felt its last breath.

And still left the dawn  
In a golden-rimmed cup—  
God give me mountains  
And strength to climb up.