

THE HIGHLANDS WITH ROPE AND RUCKSACK

A Review of Professor Baker's Book

By W. R. Lester, M.A.

As a pure sport none is nobler than that of the mountaineer. It is sportsmanship in its highest and most unselfish form, for here are necessarily brought into play and put to the test those qualities which it is well that a man should possess. Voluntarily he pits himself against the forces of nature in their grandest and most exacting forms, and in the act must call forth all that is in him of strength, skill, endurance, as well as absolute loyalty to and co-operation with, his comrades. The mountaineer who cannot draw on qualities such as these will never excel in his craft. For his own sake as well as his companions, such a one had better give it a wide berth. And it has the added recommendation of being a completely unselfish sport, for it does not involve the slaughter or mutilation of any dumb animal as do so many pastimes which masquerade under the name. The risks—and they are many—are purely personal and are voluntarily undertaken by the climber himself.

The ground covered by the author of this book* is confined to Scotland, where the field is much wider than commonly supposed, though, except to those who make a point of seeking out difficulties, it does not afford opportunity for following the sport in its most exacting forms. He gives us very pleasant records of tramps and climbs throughout almost every part of the Scottish Highlands, and these are interspersed by well-chosen photographs which add to the value of a book which even apart from them is very readable.

But to ourselves the outstanding feature of Mr. Baker's book, and one which places it in a class of its own, is the introduction. This is of a kind by no means usual in books on mountaineering or adventure, and to some minds the author will lay himself open to the charge of trenching on a province which is not germane to his subject. So far from agreeing with any such view, we hold that Mr. Baker has performed a very valuable public service in writing this introduction and one which we hope and believe will bear fruit. We do not envy the man who, after reading this part of Mr. Baker's book, does not rise with feelings of sadness and even of indignation. For here is a man of wide views and clearly a lover of his country, who feels it his bounden duty to record how great tracts of the Scottish Highlands have been reduced to what is actually a close preserve which renders it in great degree inaccessible to the common man—climber or other. Here is a land of unique beauty, designed as few others in the world as a magnificent health and recreation ground. In natural beauty it rivals and in some respects excels either Switzerland or Norway, and if given a fair chance might also rival them, not only as a centre of health and pleasure to multitudes, but also as a rich source of profit to the nation. But under the conditions so vividly described by Mr. Baker, this cannot be, for large tracts are taboo and access to many of its grandest mountains and glens is only possible—if at all—by the good graces of the men who claim them as their private property. In such territories Mr. Baker tells us how every device is made use of to close them to all but the deer stalker and the grouse shooter. Where once lived and prospered a virile population we now find an empty wilderness with the ruins still visible of the cottages which once were homes. And on such remnants of a people as still is there, every embargo is placed to prevent them

receiving visitors from outside who would see and enjoy for themselves the beauties which there abound.

The author tells how in the region of Rothiemurchus and Glenmore—this exquisite region of woods and waters—his own family has experienced the strict reign of terror there maintained, so that even cottagers who made a little by taking in summer visitors were kept in a state of nervous panic. He tells how his family was refused rooms taken months in advance, when it leaked out that some of them intended to go on the hills, and how a lady who had been guilty of sketching in a glen celebrated for its grandeur found she could not get rooms next summer anywhere in the district. Such are the things done in the name of a "sport" strictly limited to the select few and, in its nature, infinitely below the true sport with which this book deals.

For fuller information as to how the Highlands were denuded of their population in past times, and are still kept empty to-day, we cannot do better than refer the reader to *THE HIGHLANDS WITH ROPE AND RUCKSACK*. Mr. Baker has not hesitated to "call a spade a spade." In times when so many lovers of the mountains are content to place themselves at the mercy of those who lay claim to own them, with the short-sighted notion that in this way will they most easily get access to their favourite haunts, Mr. Baker earns special praise in having taken the braver course. He seems to know that only through the growth of a healthy public opinion can these abuses be swept away, and that such opinion can only be formed on a knowledge of the facts which he so boldly submits to his readers. Our hope is that this book will be very widely read and will achieve the end our author has in view.

SCOTTISH DEER FORESTS

Speaking at a meeting held in Dunbar (GLASGOW HERALD, 31st January), organized by the Scottish Home Rule Association, Mr. J. M. MacDiarmid said that deer forests were bleeding Scotland white. In 1919 the total acreage reported to be under deer forests by the Commissioners was noted as 3,600,000 acres. Adding to this other land advertised for deer forests, but not included in the Commissioner's Report, the total reached fully 4,000,000, or roughly one-fifth of Scotland given over to that form of sport. The Deer Forest Commission also reported that 1,935,000 acres scheduled as deer forest land was suitable for pastorage or small holdings. Ten thousand applications for land for small holdings were lying with the Small Landholders' Commission for attention, and Mr. MacDiarmid said there would be 20,000 applications if it was thought that there was any real chance of getting small holdings. In his opinion, their only hope lay in the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in Scotland.

The Labour Party Executive to-day decided that whatever success Labour Members achieve in the ballot for private members' Bills shall be devoted to furthering: 1, A Building Materials (Profiteering) Bill; 2, A Right to Work Bill; and 3, An Equal Franchise Bill.—LIVERPOOL POST, 11th February.

What has happened to Labour pledges to promote the Taxation of Land Values, that the Executive has no instructions to give in that regard? Is it nothing to neglect such an opportunity for debate?

To this report in the LIVERPOOL POST we append the more satisfactory announcement in the DAILY CHRONICLE of 14th February that on behalf of the Liberal Party Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., successful in the ballot, will take charge of a Bill for the Valuation of Land and the Rating of Land Values.

* *THE HIGHLANDS WITH ROPE AND RUCKSACK*. By E. A. Baker, D.Lit., M.A. H. F. and G. Witherby, London. 12s 6d.