

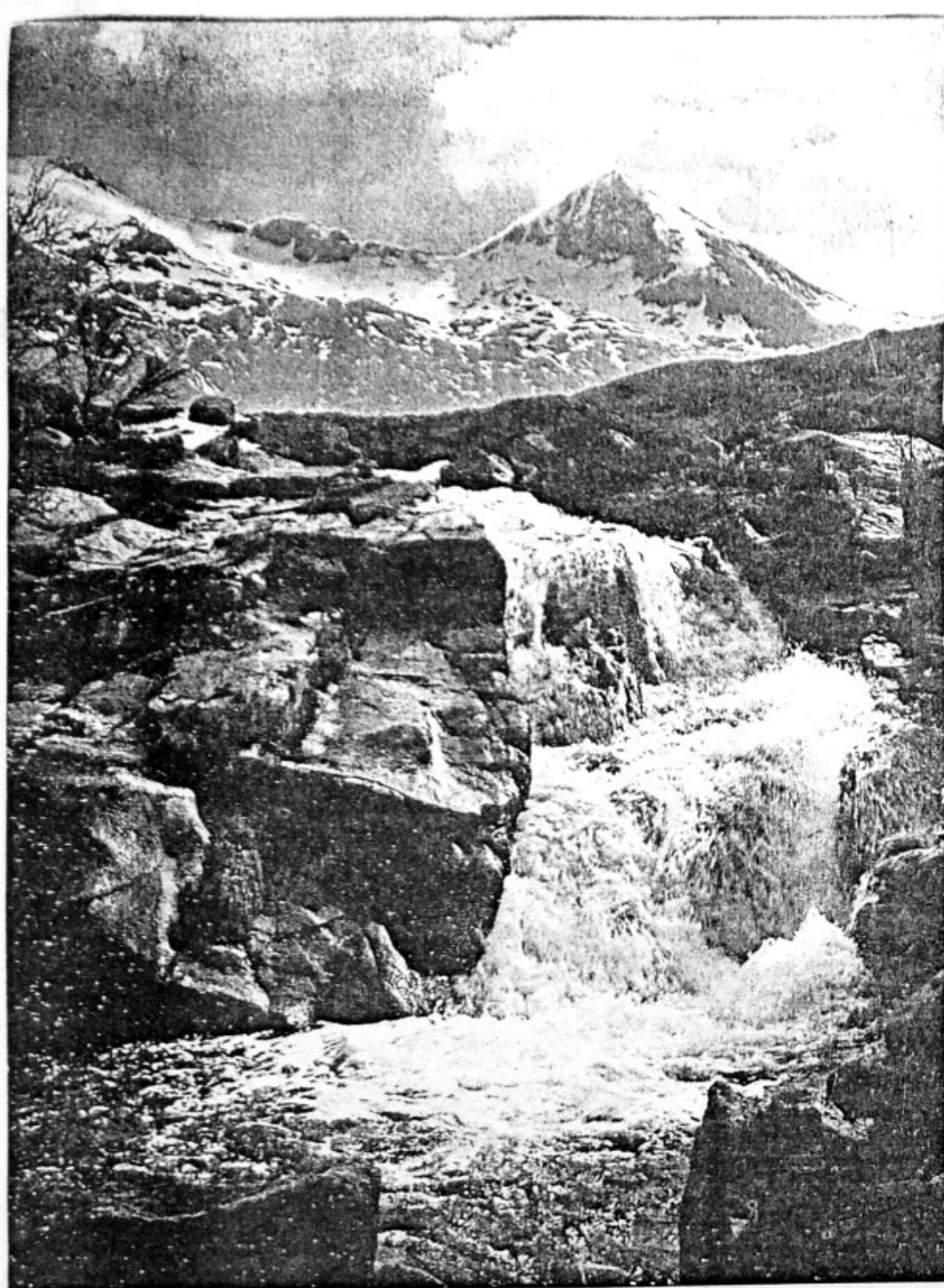
Colin Will
Librarian

Sent at Mary Noble's request.

Colin Will



ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN, EDINBURGH EH3 5LR
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The River Noe plunging over rocks on its way down Glen Noe to flow into Loch Etive.
The snow-covered peak in the background is Ben Cruachan (3689 feet).

The SCOTS MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 1/
1954

ROYAL BOTANIC
GARDEN

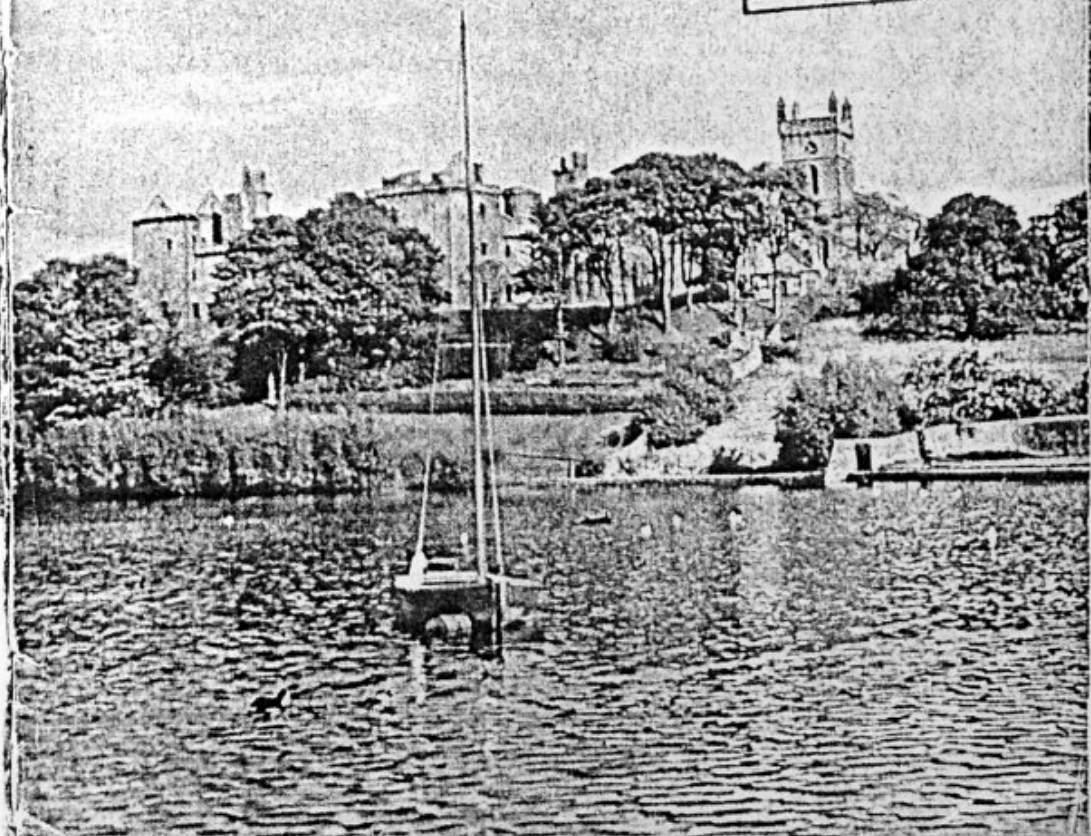
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Looking across Gruinard Bay, in Wester Ross. Many of Mr Adam's best pictures have been taken along Scotland's western coastline, where the light and the atmosphere are much to his liking.

"Photograph by Robert M. Adam . . ."

For half a century Robert M. Adam has been photographing the Scottish scene. This feature describes the man and his work, and brings together a selection of his favourite photographs.



Robert M. Adam

LOCH TREIG, lying to the north of Rannoch Moor, can be an isolated spot indeed in winter. It could also, Robert M. Adam realised, provide some very fine photographs under the right conditions. The nearest point to which the train would take him was Corroun Halt, and when he arrived there one January day the snow was lying as high as the platform, and the heavy skies forecast more to come. Carrying all his equipment, he set out to walk along the railway line towards Loch Treig, three miles away, but before long it started to snow, and he was forced to shelter in a culvert for a spell, starting out again as soon as it had eased off. By this time his hopes of getting any pictures were very low, but just after he reached Loch Treig the weather cleared.

"Nothing could have been more impressive," he recalls. "In no time at all the sun was shining out of a sky of almost Mediterranean blue, and all around there was hardly a blemish on the snow."

So he picked out the views he wanted, made his way back along the three miles of snow-covered track to Corroun, and a few more photographs of the Scottish scene were added to his collection.

It is many years now since that occasion, and Mr Adam would be the first to admit that most of his pictures have been more easily come by, but it does illustrate very clearly the patience, the determination and the planned approach which he brings to his work. Each photograph is treated as a distinct operation—to be at a certain point, at a certain time of the day and year, under certain conditions of weather. He will never, of course, refuse a picture which some unusual effect of clouds and lighting has made momentarily available, but these are gratefully accepted, as would be an unexpected gift. The photographs

he takes most pride in are the ones he has planned.

Not for him are the ways of many photographers of today—a quick tour of a district, clicking a camera in all directions as they go. Mr Adam prefers to stay in a district, absorbing its atmosphere and its moods, and closely studying the landscape, before deciding on the pictures which he wants. Often he will appreciate the possibilities of a certain view under different conditions, and, although years may elapse, he seldom fails to pay another visit.

A son of the manse, Robert M. Adam was born in Carluke, Lanarkshire, on January 1st, 1885. As a boy he had a great enthusiasm for clambering about the cliffs on the Scottish mainland and islands, studying the wide variety of bird life to be found there, and it was, in fact, a desire to record the progressive stages of a bird's growth which led him, in 1899, to acquire his first camera. He still has that camera, a quarter-plate model, today, and although fifty-five years of wear and tear have led to the use of much glue and sticking plaster, it remains perfectly capable of taking a picture.

In 1904, while studying at the Art College in Edinburgh, Robert M. Adam was invited to enter the Royal Botanic Garden to undertake special botanical draughtsmanship. The next ten years were spent studying at the University, and generally completing the specialised training required for the scientific post in the Gardens to which he was appointed in 1914 and which he held until his retirement in 1949. When this is borne in mind, his collection of over fourteen thousand photographs becomes the more notable, for they were practically all acquired during weekends, annual holidays and the occasional free days to which he was entitled. Certainly the authorities at the Garden were always as



A quieter subject than many of his scenes, this house near Struan, in Perthshire, caught Mr Adam's eye, and he proceeded to make an attractive picture out of it.

helpful as possible, but the fact remains that for all these years he was first and foremost a full-time botanist. Photography had always to take second call on his time.

It is, of course, as a photographer that Mr Adam is most widely known today, but his research work as a botanist, which was, at least at the outset of his career, his primary interest, is also notable. Besides preparing a host of papers on Alpine plants, he wrote a *flora* of Caithness, and did much useful work in connection with marine vegetation.

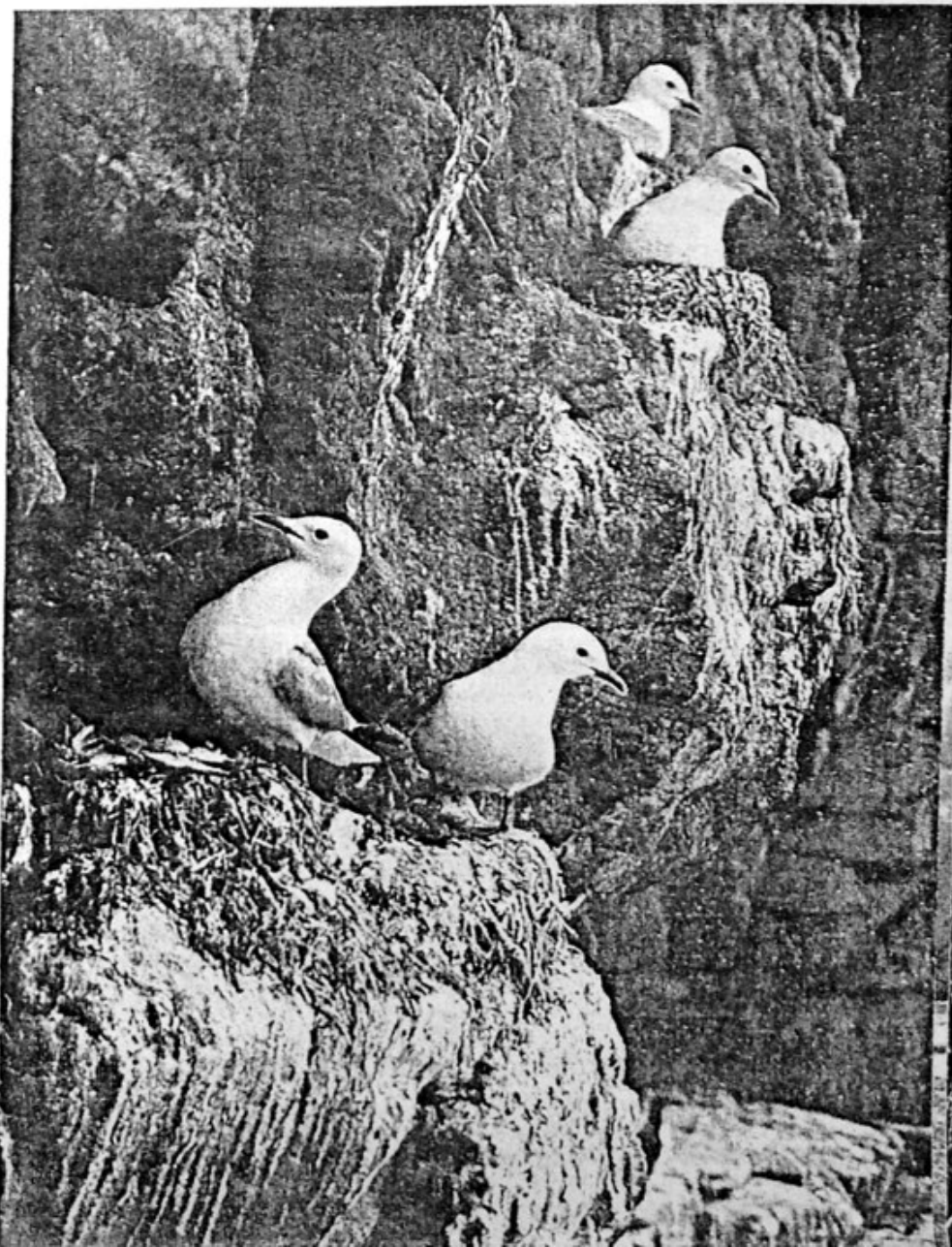
Not unnaturally for anyone who has seen so much of Scotland, Mr Adam finds it difficult to select a single district as being his favourite. Perhaps the whole of the western coastline would be his choice, where sun and clouds provide an ever-

changing pattern of light and shade on the sea lochs and the islands, the sandy bays and the mountain peaks. He is especially fond of Loch Duich, with its impressive combination of mountains and sea, and, a little to the south, of Loch Hourn, the "Loch of Hell," whose forbidding atmosphere he has captured excellently with his camera.

Coming away from the coastline, Glenfinnan ranks high in his estimation, as does Glen Affric, in which he has a special interest going back twenty-five years.

In 1929 hydro-electric schemes were in their infancy, and when a plan was evolved to harness the waters of Glen Affric, nobody gave the matter much attention. Robert M. Adam realised, however, how thoughtless construction could ruin

It was a youthful interest in studying the development of sea birds which led Robert M. Adam to start using a camera. This study of a Kittiwake Gull colony was taken on the cliffs of Mingulay in 1905.



the beauty of the area, and in an effort to arouse public opinion, he sent four of his finest photographs of Glen Affric, with a small piece of explanatory text—his one and only essay into journalism, he comments—to every principal morning newspaper in Great Britain. The reactions of the papers were very satisfactory, for many of them featured some of his photographs, but even more gratifying was the nation-wide concern which resulted. As a result, when the Bill came up in Parliament, it was closely scrutinised and adequate safeguards inserted.

Since then Mr Adam had no opportunity of re-visiting Glen Affric until early this year, by which time considerable further hydro-electric work had been completed, but he returned warm in the praise for the way it had been done with a minimum of harm to the beauty of the district.

The camera with which most of Robert M. Adam's photographs have been taken, and the one which he still uses today, is a half-plate stand model which he acquired in 1908. He has had several others, of course, including reflexes and miniatures, but he still feels happiest with that half-plate camera which has served him faithfully for over forty years. Miniature cameras, highly popular today because of the ease with which they can be carried, have little appeal for him. "For really good results they demand too high a degree of precision for my liking," he comments, preferring the inconvenience of carrying a relatively cumbersome camera, tripod (which is not one of these modern lightweight telescopic affairs) and plates around with him in order to get the best possible pictures.

When Mr Adam is taking a photograph, he is, quite naturally, oblivious of everything else around him, and he has no illusions about

the rather ludicrous picture he may sometimes present to any onlookers. There was one occasion when he was staying at a country house in Ireland, and decided to take some pictures in the grounds. Working beneath the black focussing hood attached to the camera, he would move camera and tripod first this way, then that way, as he tried to get the lighting and angle of his photograph just right. To the outsider it looked like nothing as much as some huge five-legged black beetle cavorting backwards and forwards on the grass, and when Mr Adam's host came upon the scene, he could not resist fetching a cine camera and recording this mysterious *modus operandi*. The resulting film afforded much entertainment whenever shown.

There is one especially pleasing picture of Robert M. Adam's, a sweeping, panoramic view of Plockton, taken from high above the village, and possessing a mood of peaceful serenity which completely belies the circumstances that surrounded the taking of the photograph. The time was a good many years ago now, and Mr Adam was having a day around Plockton, prior to catching a train to Strathcarron, where he was spending the night. It was a fine day, and he found several satisfying views, looking across Loch Carron towards Applecross and Loch Torridon.

Finally, there was only one more picture which he wanted—that view looking down on Plockton from a knoll behind the village. So he climbed the knoll, set up his camera and tripod, arranging everything to his satisfaction, and as usual, remaining completely oblivious of anything else. It was just after exposing his pictures, that he realised his watch had stopped. Simultaneously, from away below him, he could hear the whistle of a train—his train, and the last one of the day.

Picking up camera, tripod, plate-holders and all the rest of his equipment, Mr Adam raced down the hill towards the station. It seemed a losing battle from the start, and at one point he almost gave up the attempt, but a last despairing effort finished with the guard bundling photographer, camera, tripod and all into the nearest compartment as the train moved out.

When Mr Adam recovered sufficiently to take stock of his surroundings, he discovered that the carriage was already occupied by a lady and gentleman. Although they made no comment, they could scarcely have approved of this out-of-breath young man who exploded upon their privacy, closely followed by all his paraphernalia. Apologising

(To be concluded next month)

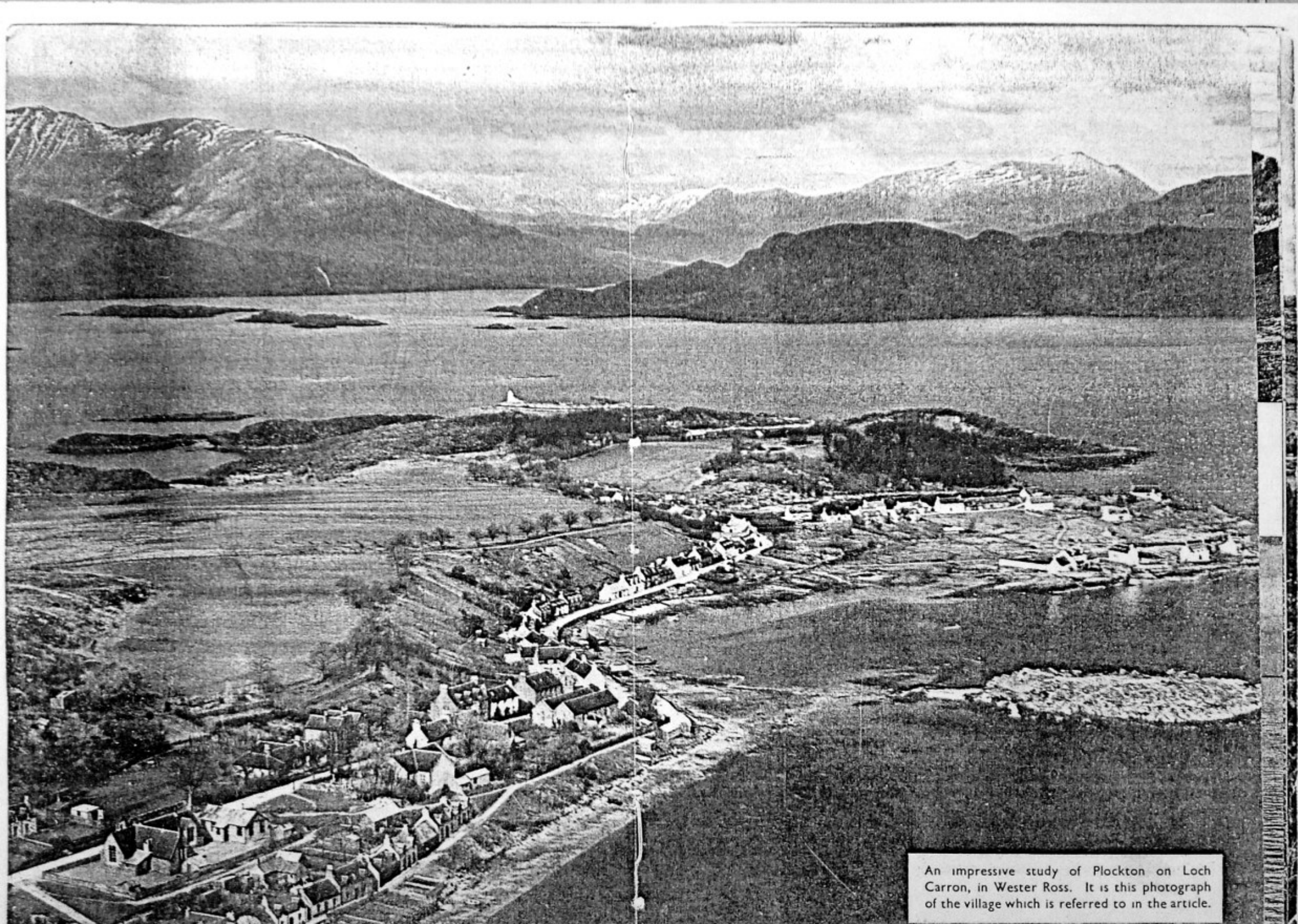
for the disturbance as best he could, he retired to the opposite corner of the carriage, there to tidy himself up and dismantle his camera. His two travelling companions left the train soon after, and Mr Adam continued uneventfully to Strathcarron.

The sequel to that story did not come until many years later, when Robert M. Adam, by now a well-known figure, was invited to stay at a house in the district. Shortly after his arrival he realised that his host and hostess were none other than the couple he had met in the train. They were highly amused when Mr Adam told them, and still remembered the incident well.

An earlier sequel, of course, was that Robert M. Adam had obtained one more excellent photograph.

Loch Duich is one of Mr Adam's favourite districts and he ranks this view from Keppoch, of the loch and the Kintail peaks, as one of his best for the way in which it has caught the sombre atmosphere of mountains, clouds and water in combination.

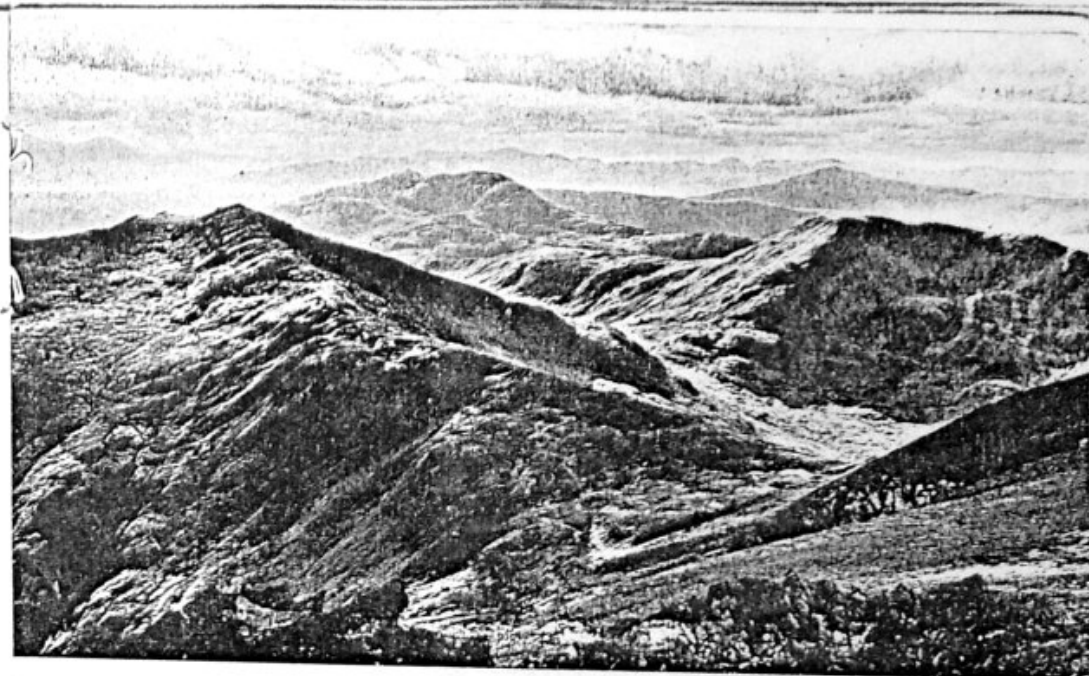




An impressive study of Plockton on Loch Carron, in Wester Ross. It is this photograph of the village which is referred to in the article.

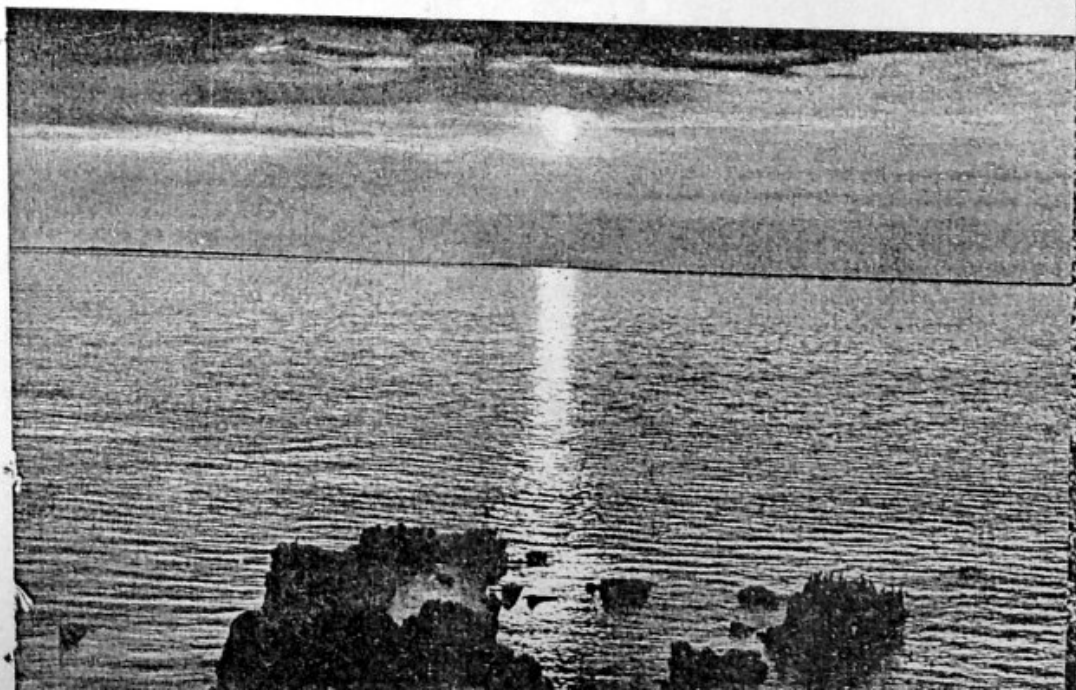
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A springtime carpet of snowdrops at Arniston, in Midlothian. Mr Adam's dual interests as botanist and photographer have often combined to produce an attractive picture.



A panorama of peaks, looking westward from the summit of Ben Lawers towards the distant mountains of Argyll. A photograph taken on a day so still that a lighted match could be held aloft on the top of Ben Lawers.

The setting sun and the Atlantic Ocean make a pleasing pattern in this view, from the Treshnish Isles, of Coll and Tiree, two islands so flat that their contours can scarcely be distinguished between sea and sky.



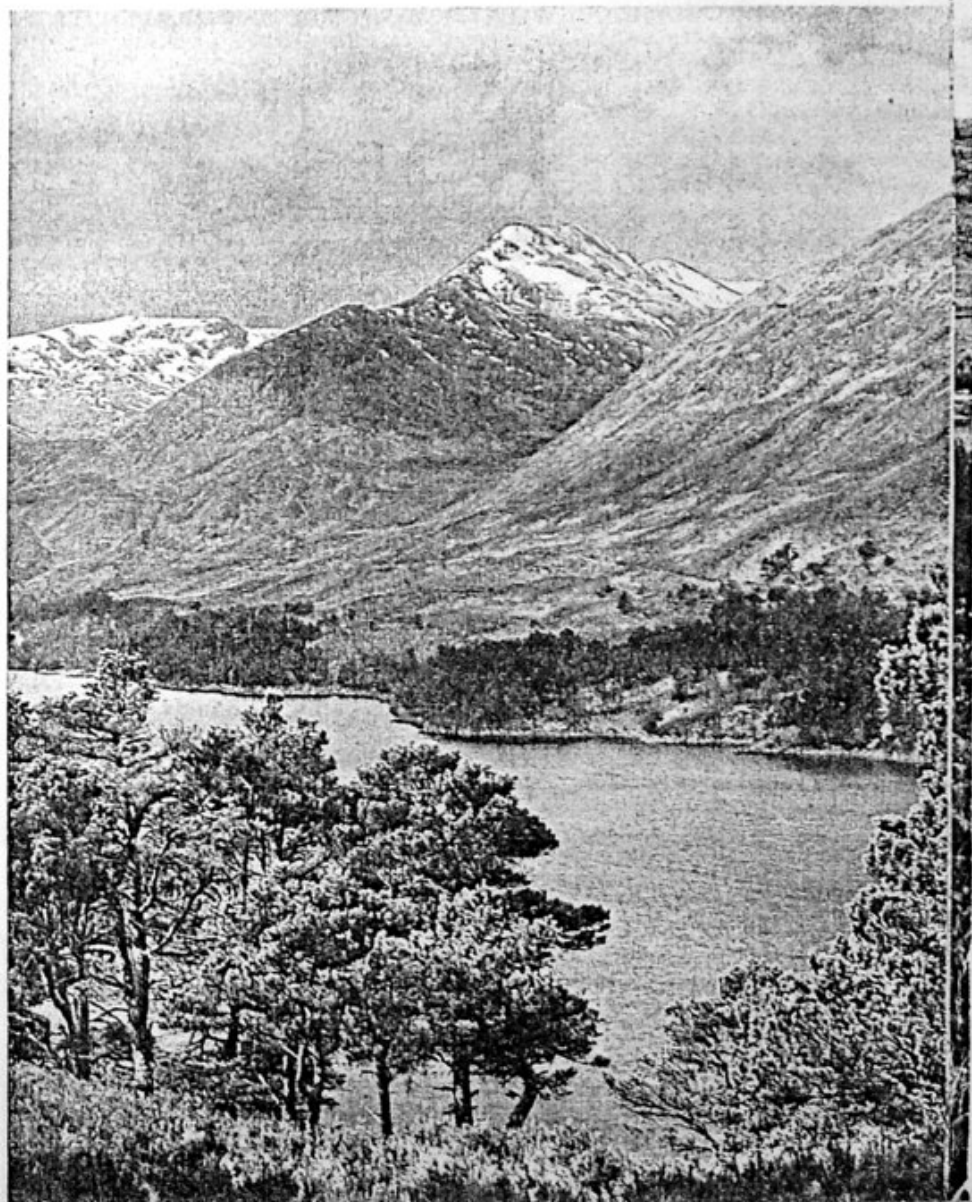


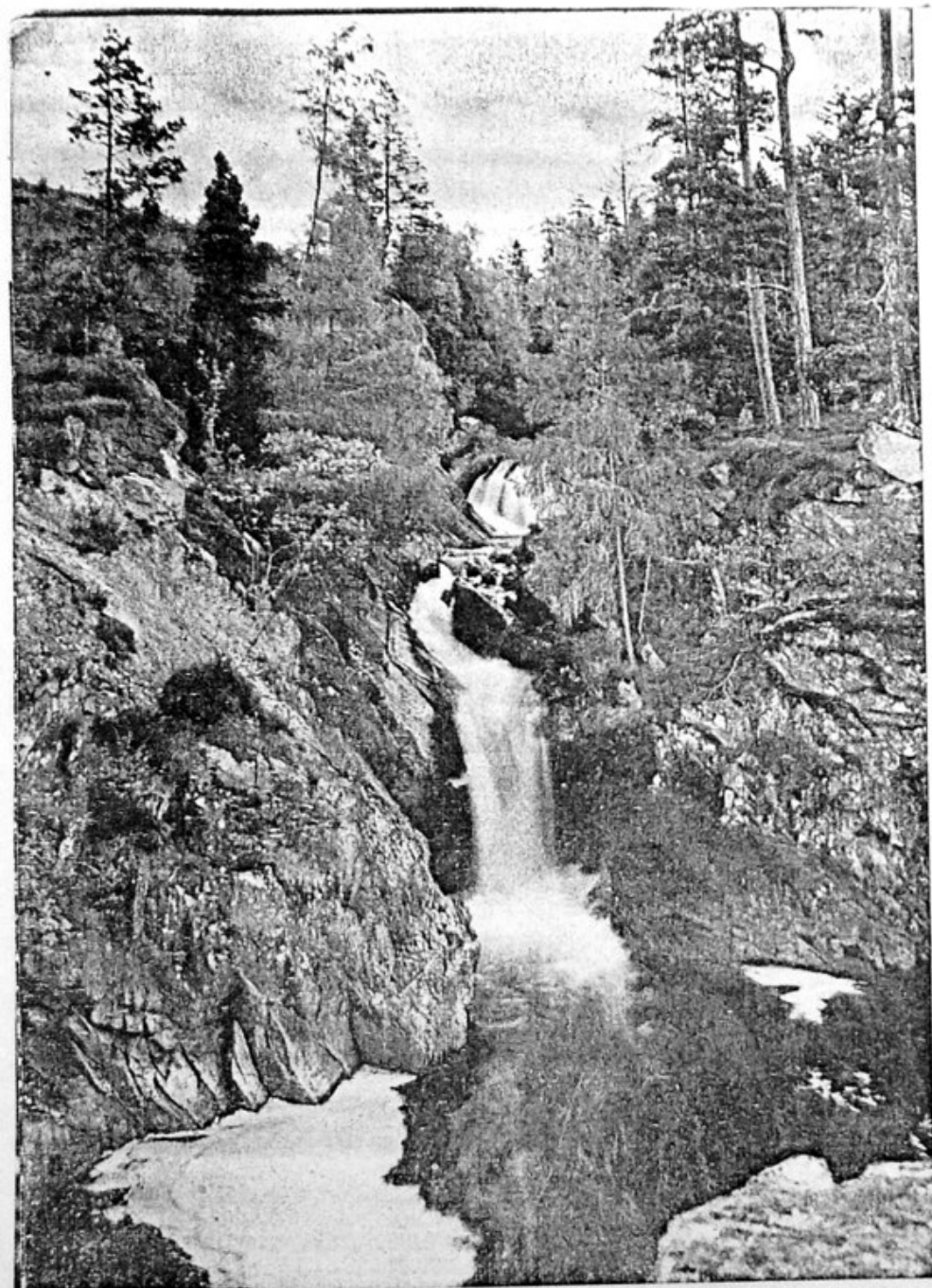
A corner of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, where Robert M. Adam worked as a botanist until his retiral in 1949.

A view of the Heights of Trotternish, in northern Skye, which catches well the desolate character of the scene.



One of the four views of Glen Affric and Loch Affric with which Mr Adam waged his campaign in 1929 to safeguard the beauties of the glen against possible damage by hydro-electric construction.

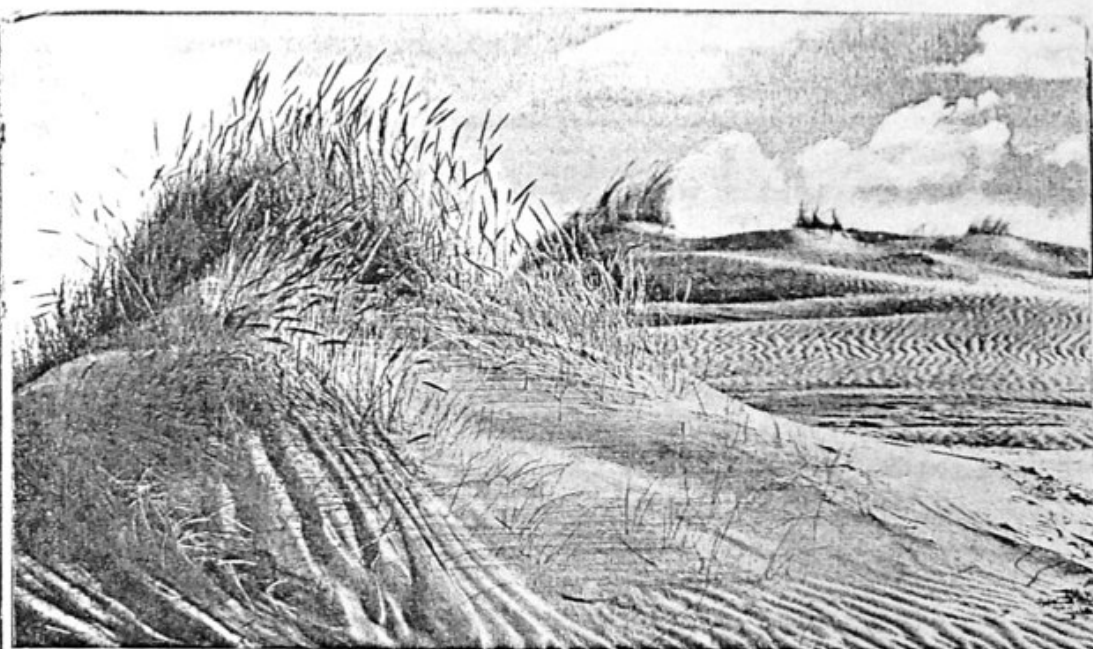




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The Falls of Bruar, on the Bruar Water in Perthshire, about a mile above where that stream joins the Garry. One of Robert M. Adam's more recent photographs, taken in 1953.



Grass gaining a hold on a ridge of dunes in the Culbin Sands. A photograph which is as interesting a botanical record as it is attractive a picture.

Dogs are not a frequent subject for Mr Adam's camera, but when this group of game dogs came on the scene at Braemore on the moors of Caithness, they obviously seemed to belong in the picture. The peak in the background is the Maiden Paps (1587 feet).

