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GRANVILLE**

THE ENGLISH LAKES

Arthur Bradley
The English Lakes

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A. G. Bradley

The English Lakes

WINDERMERE AND CONISTON

The luxuriance of Windermere is of course its dominant note, a quality infinitely enhanced by that noble array of mountains which from Kirkstone to Scafell trail across the northern sky beyond the broad shimmer of its waters. The upward view from various points in the neighbourhood of Bowness, for obvious reasons of railroad transportation, has been the first glimpse of the Lake District for a majority of two or three generations of visitors, and this alone gives some further significance to a scene in any case so beautiful. Orrest Head, a few hundred feet above the village of Windermere, is the point to which the pilgrim upon the first opportunity usually betakes himself; for from this modest altitude the entire lake with its abounding beauty of detail, and half the mountain kingdom of Lakeland, are spread out before him.

On the slopes of Orrest, too, is the house of Elleray, successor to that older one in which Professor Wilson, by no means the least one of the Wordsworthian band, led his breezy, strenuous life. Son of a wealthy Glasgow merchant, winner of the Newdigate and a first classman at Oxford, and scarcely less conspicuous for his athletic feats and sporting wagers, young Wilson bought the land at Elleray while an undergraduate and built a house on it later, after the passing of an unsatisfactory love affair. As "Christopher North" every lover of the rod with any sense of its literature knows him yet. Nor would all this be worthy of record were it not that the brilliant little band who did none of these things held Wilson of Elleray as one of themselves. Losing his fortune ten years later through a defaulting trustee, he became the brilliant supporter of *Blackwood* and Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh University, though always retaining his connection with Windermere. In fact, when Scott made his memorable visit to the Lake District, and with Lockhart and Canning stayed with the then owner of Storrs Hall, now a hotel on the lake shore, we find Wilson doing the honours of Windermere as commodore of its large fleet of yachts.

Country houses, villas, and rich woods cluster thickly up and down either shore; here and there perhaps a little too thickly. But the general prospect up to Ambleside on the one hand, and down past Curwen Island – named after one of the oldest of Cumbrian families – to Newby Bridge on the other, is no whit blemished. One feels it to be a region rather of delightful residence, which indeed it is, than of temporary sojourn for the tourist, with the mountains beckoning him into the deeper heart of Lakeland and to more primitive forms of nature. Shapely yachts flit hither and thither, less alluring steamboats plough white furrows, while the irresponsible pleasure boat is in frequent evidence. Occasionally, too, there are winters when the great lake glistens with thick glassy ice from end to end beneath snow-peaked mountains, and the glories of such a brief period – glories of scene and of physical exhilaration – shine out in the memory yet more luminously than the unending pageants of summer; even the pageants of early June when the lake is quiet, and in sequestered bays the angler, like his neighbour of Derwentwater, celebrates the festival of the May-fly, the only one seriously observed by the lusty and wily trout of these two waters.

The personal associations of these opulent shores of Windermere are too crowded for us here; but Dr. Arnold of Rugby had, of course, his holiday home of Foxhowe near the Ambleside end, which is still occupied by his daughter.

Calgarth and its fine woods, just under Orrest, is the oldest and perhaps the most notable place on the lake, partly because in ancient times the well-known family of Phillipson lived there, though in a former house, a dare-devil race in the Civil War period, one of whom, known as Robert the Devil, did all sorts of heady things. The *skulls of Calgarth*, too, which occupied niches in the old hall

and could never be got rid of, wherever flung to, always returning to their place on the wall, are a treasured legend of the district. But the present mansion and woods of Calgarth are little more than a century old, and are the work of another Lakeland luminary of the Wordsworthian period. Bishop Watson, officially of Llandaff but otherwise of Calgarth, is famous in ecclesiastical history and of immortal memory in Wales, not for the things he did, but rather for the things he left undone. For he was bishop of Llandaff for about thirty years, and only once visited his diocese in that period, preferring the life of a country gentleman at Windermere.

Precisely parallel to Windermere, a little more than half its length and half its breadth, and four miles to the westward, lies Coniston, its head in the mountains, its foot almost trenching on another, and virtually lowland, country. There can be no doubt whatever about the presiding genii of Coniston, the "Old Man" in the substance and Ruskin in the shadow, if one may put it that way, having no rivals. The hills crowd finely around their leader, the "Allt-maen" (lofty rock), at the lake-head, as our artist well shows. As the lake shoots southward, however, in a straight line, without any conspicuous curves or headlands, and no heights comparable to those it leaves behind, one feels upon thus looking down it that Coniston lacks something of the fascination which never flags at any part of the other lakes. If Windermere, too, trails away from the mountains, it does so in glorious bends and headlands, curves and islands, and has an opulence of detail and colouring all its own. But if Coniston, with its straight unbroken stretch all fully displayed, and framed in a fashion less winsome than Windermere, and less imposing than Ullswater, "lets you down" a little on arriving at its head, looking upward from its centre it assuredly lacks nothing, while the view from Ruskin's old home of Brantwood, perched high among woods upon the eastern shore, commands all that is best of it. After thirty years of intermittent residence here, Ruskin was buried in the churchyard at Coniston, exactly half a century after Wordsworth had been laid to rest at Grasmere. A generation later than his great predecessor he has Coniston to himself. And if the points of divergence between the two seers have been more than sufficiently insisted upon, it is from the very fact, perhaps, that in intellect and temperament they had so much in common.

THE HEART OF LAKELANDRYDAL AND GRASMERE

Those delectable little sister lakes of Rydal and Grasmere probably suggest themselves to most of us as the heart of Lakeland. If we took a map and measuring rule we might possibly be surprised to find, as we should do, this vague intuition geometrically verified. How singularly felicitous, then, one may surely deem it, that Wordsworth lived and died here, and that the shrine of the sage and all thereby implied should be thus planted in the very innermost sanctuary of the hills.

The intrinsic charm of these two little lakes and all that pertains to them lies in the delightful variety exhibited within a small compass of wood and water, of rugged crag and fern-clad slope, of velvety park-like meadow and stately timber. The blithesome Rothay unites the upper and larger lake of Grasmere with Rydal Water by a short half-mile display in meadow and ravine of every winsome mood that a mountain stream has at command. The broken, straggling heights and skirts of Loughrigg Fell fill most of the western side of either lake, and on a minor scale, like the stream below, show every type of form and colouring, of drapery primeval or man-made, from naked crag to bowery lawn, all within the compass of three miles and the modest altitude of a thousand feet.

Rydal Water has almost the air of being designed for the embellishment of man's immediate haunts. With its occasionally reedy fringe, it breathes the spirit of quiet, almost domestic beauty, and of the spirit of solitude scarcely anything. Of Grasmere as much and as little might be said. The atmosphere of seclusion that wraps at normal times so many of the lakes seems here frankly absent. Nothing, indeed, is lost by this sense of human propinquity; for all is exquisite. But the sign of appreciative humanity, residential or transient, is more than commonly strong. Yet Grasmere is a favourite haunt, too, of the serious pedestrian, not merely because it is beautiful, but because it is central. The lake tourist might be reasonably classified under four heads: the crag climbers, the strenuous walkers, the saunterers, and the roadsters. The first are a mere handful, for obvious reasons, and greatly affect Wastdale Head. The second are not very numerous, and seem on the decline. The third include a substantial number, whose limitations are dictated either by lack of physical strength or an indifference to the strenuous life; by a preference for the tennis court, or croquet lawn, or a pair of sculls, with a further company, always numerous among Britons, who have an unconquerable aversion to missing a single one of the four conventional meals. Of the roadsters, the cyclist may get a great deal out of the Lake country, and is nowadays quite innocuous to others. As for the motor, it has proved for all true lovers of this region an unmitigated curse. It is truly pitiable to see these green vales half buried at times under dense volumes of driving dust, or the same noisome clouds falling in heavy masses on the fair surface and flowery banks of Rydal or Ullswater. The roads, too, are often tortuous and narrow. There was a talk at one time of prohibition within Lakeland, and there would seem in equity no justification in this glorious holiday preserve for unlimited vehicles roaring through it at twenty to thirty miles an hour. It lies on no main highway. And for touring use within the district the motor has no single point of sanity. One might almost as well thrash up and down Grasmere in a steam yacht. Their exclusion, with a few exceptions for local purposes or for genuine residents, would be an enormous gain, and any counter plea ridiculously inadequate. I have here pictured Rydal Water as a winsome summer lake, for this I am sure, before most of us who know it, its image rises.

But upon a spring day some years ago I watched it raging with abnormal frenzy under the influence of a helm wind, cleaving diligently myself in the meantime to a stone wall, lest peradventure I should be blown into its seething waters. These hurricanes are idiosyncrasies of the Lake country, and are formed by the contact of winds from the North Sea with the warmer temperature they meet as they leap over the Pennine range, like a wave breaking over a sea wall. The disturbance thus created drives them down in narrow tornadoes upon Lakeland. I have never experienced anything else like it in these islands. The waters of Rydal on this occasion, now here and now there, were lifted high into the air in the fashion of successive waterspouts and hurled in hissing volumes of sleet at a great

elevation against the woody foot of Loughrigg Fell. The sun, too, was shining brilliantly, and every hurtling cloud of spray glittered in prismatic colours. But above all are these two lakes bound up with the name and fame of Wordsworth. From one or other of the banks of them for nearly half a century the great nature poet – the prophet, sage, and interpreter of Lakeland – of whose fruits the world will pluck as long as these hills endure, set forth on his almost daily ramble. Whether this or that generation decide that Wordsworth is among the elect of their fleeting day is an altogether trumpery question. Didactic and complaisant youth have tilted against many a classic and passed into oblivion while the subject of their convincing satire remains immovable as a granite rock. Wordsworth has struck roots so deep into this glorious country, has so identified it with his own personality, that even if he were a much lesser poet, immortal fame would be as surely his as the endurance of Skiddaw or Helvellyn. But Wordsworth has a firmer grip than that of mere atmosphere on unborn generations, though this almost alone would endear him to all those with any sense of feeling who love the Lake country, and of such it is inconceivable that future generations will not each supply their ample store. It is pedantry to hector every man or woman who feels the spirit of our British Highlands so perfectly expressed as they are in this Lake country into Wordsworthian enthusiasm. But let them alone, and as the Lakeland fever begins to develop more strongly with each visitation, and as spring and summer come round, if they have the sense of song at all within them they will put their Wordsworth at any rate within reach, and the process thenceforward to some measure of intimacy and delight is merely an affair of time.

Rydal Mount, standing embowered in foliage above the road which afterwards skirts both lakes, is not accessible, but Dove Cottage on Grasmere, where the poet, with his gifted sister and for a time with S. T. Coleridge, spent the years preceding his long married life at Rydal Mount, is open to the pilgrim, be he a devout or an indifferent one. It will be hardly less interesting as the residence for twenty years of that strange genius, stylist, and laudanum drinker, De Quincey. Apart from the great literary obligations under which he has laid posterity, the autobiographical volume which deals with this Lake country, and the brilliant circle of which he was a member, is a book of extraordinary interest. He married a local yeoman's daughter, and the domestic side of his life, including a devoted and successful family, infinitely alleviates the tragedy of his own long and indifferently successful struggle with the fatal drug. The weak-willed but lovable and brilliant Hartley Coleridge, too, who would dash off a sonnet in ten minutes, lived at Nab Cottage, on Rydal Water, till he was laid in Grasmere Churchyard, to be followed there by Wordsworth in the succeeding year of 1850. Wordsworth himself was never really in touch with his humbler neighbours. He had not the temperament for that kind of thing, and remained a continual mystery to most of them.

"Well, John, what's the news?" said the rather too sociable Hartley Coleridge one morning to an old stone-breaker.

"Why, nowte varry particlar, only ald Wudsworth's brocken lowce ageean." This had reference to the poet's habit of spouting his productions as he walked along the roads, which was taken by the country folk as a sign of mental aberration. On another occasion a stranger resting at a cottage in Rydal enquired of the housewife as to Wordsworth's neighbourly qualities.

"Well," said she, "he sometimes goes booin' his pottery about t' rooads an' t' fields an' takes na nooatish o' neabody; but at udder times he'll say 'Good morning, Dolly,' as sensible as oyder you or me."

THIRLMERE AND HELVELLYN

Lying beside the familiar and continuously beautiful road from Grasmere to Keswick, Thirlmere has happily lost nothing of its pristine beauty in becoming the source of Manchester's water supply. An engine house at one point and the big dam, only visible at the far end, are more than counterbalanced in the raising for many feet of a lake that is three miles long and only a quarter of a mile wide. That first delicious view of it which greets the pilgrim on the downward winding road from the pass of Dunmaile Raise, deep channelled between the rugged wall of Armboth Crags and the northern shoulders of Helvellyn, with the pale cone of Skiddaw rising over the hidden interval beyond, will be among the most familiar memories of the lake tourist. These grey Armboth steeps, falling from the wild moorish table-land above so abruptly to the water's edge, and planting everywhere their knotted pine-feathered toes in the deep clear water, with the little promontories and islands wooded in the like fashion, give a character all its own to the narrow but beautiful lake. As a road now skirts both shores, those denied the physical joy of walking this country can get all that the banks, at any rate, of Thirlmere have to offer. The best of this, no doubt, is the prospect here depicted from the lower end, with Old Helvellyn looming so near and filling up the vista to the southward.

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