

HOLIDAYING AT WINDERMERE.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

MANY years ago—I must be excused condescending on the precise number—a Yorkshire friend and I spent a brief week-end in the English Lake District. We had two days only at our disposal. Setting out from Keswick on the first day, we walked along Derwentwater by the Borrowdale road to the Falls of Lodore—a most disappointing spectacle. I still remember our wondering where Southey got the inspiration for the wonderful torrent of words with which he described “The Cataract of Lodore,” culminating in the lines :—

Advancing and prancing and glancing and dancing,
Recoiling, turmoiling and toiling and boiling,
And dashing and flashing and splashing and clashing ;
And so never ending, but always descending,
All at once and all o'er, with a mighty uproar,
And this way the Water comes down at Lodore.

The fact is that the falls as thus figured can be seen only after heavy rain. In ordinary weather people can do as we did—scramble easily up the rocky defile to the Watendlath Beck, the small stream which makes the fall. We walked alongside the beck for a couple of miles, and then made for the fells in front. Mist bothered us a bit and compelled us to alter our projected route. We got over High Raise all right, however, and this brought us within comparatively easy distance of the Langdale Pikes, a singular double-headed mountain, constituting a very notable feature of Lake scenery. We made for the head known as Harrison Stickle, and then descended to the Stickle Tarn. From this we found our way to Easedale Tarn—a way made smooth for us (in a sense) by our falling in with a party of pedestrians bound thither who were familiar with

the ground. The long day's walk ended at Grasmere, which we reached about eight o'clock at night. Next day we walked across the Grisedale Pass to Patterdale, this pass having much the same relation to Dollywaggon Pike and Helvellyn that the Làirig Dhrù has to Cairntoul and Braeriach. Then from Patterdale, which is situated at the head of Ullswater, we walked along the east side of that lake to Pooley Bridge, at its foot. This was another long walk, added to which, in the late evening, was a "bittock" of five miles from Pooley Bridge to Penrith, in order to catch a train at midnight to convey my friend to business next day.

The two walks gave us an insight into the scenery of the Lake district, and our appreciation of its beauties led to the customary vow to return at an early date and further explore this attractive region of mountain, lake, and dale. Such vows are easily made, and just as easily broken. Most of us probably have made them at one time or other and failed to keep them. "The world is too much with us." Competing holiday claims intervene; the demands of family and friendly intercourse have to be recognised and met. And so, or for other reasons, the mutual undertaking of my Yorkshire friend and myself has never been redeemed, and it was not until last summer that I found myself in "Lakeland" again. Then, unfortunately, the *Tempora mutantur* adage came into play. Advancing years, reinforced by medical orders, forbade strenuous walking of the nature just indicated, and I had to be content with looking on the fells and mountains instead of climbing them. One has almost to be apologetic in writing of mountain scenery, or any other kind of scenery, in such circumstances; but perhaps something may be said which may induce readers to betake themselves, sometime or other, to the English Lake district, and so become acquainted with its many charms.

My recent visit to the district was made in connection with a family reunion, Windermere being chosen as the meeting-place. Windermere virtually comprises two

towns which run into each other—Windermere proper, lying high up on a hillside, and Bowness, spreading below and running down to the edge of the lake. Between them, by the way, is a clock tower erected to the memory of Mr. M. J. B. Baddeley, the compiler of the well-known guide-books that bear his name. The towns are great holiday resorts in the season, and swarm with tourists and trippers, while motor-cars fly about in profusion, and large and heavily-laden char-a-bancs are encountered constantly. Accommodation had been found for us in a small but exceedingly comfortable hotel on the east side of Lake Windermere, three miles south of Bowness, situated on a slight eminence above the water and commanding a magnificent view. There was a decided advantage in being away from the two towns with their throngs of visitors and their distinctly urban air. This was counter-balanced to some extent, however, by the distance we were from Bowness, the centre for coach and char-a-banc excursions, and also by our distance from a landing-stage on the lake. A steam yacht plies up and down the lake (which is eleven miles long), making regular calls at certain places, and our nearest point for embarking or disembarking was fully a mile and a quarter away. It was the pier for the Storrs Hall Hotel—a former mansion-house converted into a hotel and enlarged by an incongruous annexe. The mansion-house has a bit of history attached to it, for Sir Walter Scott was a guest of the then owner in 1814, among his fellow-guests being Wordsworth, Southey, Canning, and “Christopher North.” “There was ‘high discourse,’” writes Lockhart (who also was of the company), “intermingled with as gay flashings of courtly wit as ever Canning displayed.” On the last day of the visit, a regatta was held in honour of Scott.

It is superfluous to say that Lake Windermere is very beautiful. I picked up in the hotel an old “Guide to the Lake District” (Prior’s) and found in it this passage: “Winander Mere is the Queen of the English Lakes.

There is something about it, some combination of feature with dimension, which is not only beautiful, but majestic. The woods with which it is clothed to the water's edge, varied here by some bluff hill, there by some white cottage or villa nooked into a recess of the craggy bank, have an indescribable charm." It would be difficult to improve upon this general description. One feels the charm instinctively, and feels at the same time the inadequacy of any attempt to convey a sense of the impression produced. The woodland setting, so rich and so continuous, constitutes a fundamental element of the charm of the lake, while its tree-covered islands form an equally effective contribution to the exquisite beauty of the scene. Hardly less contributory are the smiling dales that rise beyond the wooded heights, gradually losing themselves in the mountains behind by which the upper part of the lake is encircled. An extensive range of distant mountains of magnificent proportions dominates the lake on its western side. From our hotel windows we could see, prominent in this line of mountains, the Old Man of Coniston, Bowfell, and the Langdale Pikes. ("Old Man," be it noted, is a misnomer, being a corruption of *Alt Maen*, Celtic for "big cliff.") These and other mountains of the range are visible at numerous points along the lake-side, with varying alterations of feature according to the viewpoint and the atmospheric conditions. You here realise thoroughly the suggestiveness of Browning's lines:—

Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement !
Still moving with you ;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view.

We saw the mountains in all aspects—illuminated in bright sunshine, shrouded in dim haze, dark and lowering in the gloom of rain clouds, and gorgeous at sunset. Then would come a day when lake and mountain disappeared entirely, concealed—concealed, mayhap, for the whole day—in an impenetrable mist. There was something eerie and fantastic about this complete obliteration of a most imposing landscape.

One ought, of course, to sail up the lake—in the steam yacht referred to, or in one of the many rowing boats or motor-boats to be hired at Bowness. (I was amazed one morning to meet on the lake steamer a gentleman and his wife, not only from Aberdeen, but from my own street). A Manchester business man staying at our hotel was the proprietor of a commodious steam yacht, and on his invitation we had a cruise on the lake; and a most delightful cruise it was, as the yacht hugged the shore nearly the whole way and we were thus enabled to note the many beautiful bays and indentations of the lake. Perhaps the best and most comprehensive view of the mountains is to be had from Orrest Head, an eminence above the town of Windermere. This view is well summarised as “extending westward to Scafell, northward to Helvellyn, eastward to Ingleborough in Yorkshire, and southward to the sea at Morecambe Bay,” and it should not be missed. An excellent panorama of the view with the names of the mountains visible is given in Baddeley.

The Lake District is delectable ground for the pedestrian. Innumerable walks are at his choice, most of them having some special feature to recommend them, and he can indulge in either long-distance tramps or short and easy walks. The latter sufficed us—a walk to Bowness by the high road, for instance, returning through the Storrs Hall grounds, or southward along the same high road to Newby Bridge at the end of the lake and on to Lakeside, the terminus of the Furness Railway, returning by the lake steamer, which is run by the railway company. This road is in many ways characteristic of the district. It is of the switchback order, with numerous steep gradients, and it runs through woods luxuriant in foliage and undergrowth, and containing trees of great height, beeches, sycamores and oaks predominating, with a sprinkling of larches and birches; many bits of this road are very beautiful. There is a serious drawback, however. The road runs at a considerable elevation above the lake, and, what

with the woods and the high walls enclosing them—dykes covered with ivy and ferns, with a fringe of bramble bushes in front or rear—the lake is discernible only at intervals, at gaps in the woods or at the intervention of fields or pasture land. Moreover, as the hillside is studded with private mansions with extensive policies, it is impossible to get down to the lake front. All this is annoying, but a greater annoyance is the almost constant succession of swift-moving vehicles—motor-cars and cycles, and char-a-bancs—for this is the high road to Windermere from Lancashire, the thoroughfare for the conveyance of rich motorists and cheap trippers. The humble pedestrian is virtually driven off the road, which, with its high walls, is none too wide or safe; and he has to take refuge on an adjoining fell—if he can get access to it. A little examination will sometimes enable him to find a way; and if so he will be rewarded alike by the relief from passing vehicles and by the enlarged view that is opened up to him.

One day we crossed the lake by the ferry-boat, correctly described by Baddeley as “a useful but by no means elegant craft,” designed as it is to carry horses, carts, carriages and motor-cars, the occupants of these last complacently retaining their seats. We then walked past Esthwaite Water to Hawkshead, a quaint little village, with curiously constructed houses all huddled together. Here you are shown the Grammar School where Wordsworth was educated, his name carved out on a desk, and the house in which he lodged. From Hawkshead we set out to walk to Ambleside, but on reaching cross-roads we decided (the day being very warm) to take a more picturesque and more shaded road through woods which led to the ferry. We walked to Ambleside another day, and then on to Grasmere. Grasmere is a charming little spot on the edge of a lake, enclosed by smooth and shapely hillsides, green to their very summits; all the surroundings harmonise, yielding a soft, languorous effect, sweet rather than striking. Wordsworth and his poetry are associated with a great

part of the Lake District, but especially with Grasmere. Here is the house, Dove Cottage, where he lived with his sister from 1800 to 1808, and to which he brought his wife in 1802, and it was while living here that he wrote the best and more important of his poems. The house (in which De Quincey subsequently lived) was acquired for the nation about thirty years ago, and is now a show-place, full of Wordsworthian relics; it and the adjoining garden are kept as much as possible as they were in Wordsworth's time. The poet, his wife, and his sister are buried in Grasmere churchyard, their graves marked by very simple headstones.

The old rude church, with bare, bald tower, is here ;
 Beneath its shadow high-born Rotha flows ;
 Rotha, remembering well who slumbers near,
 And with cool murmur lulling his repose.

Rotha, remembering well who slumbers near.
 His hills, his lakes, his streams are with him yet.
 Surely the heart that read her own heart clear
 Nature forgets not soon : 'tis we forget.

Thus Sir William Watson in his "Wordsworth's Grave," the first poem to secure him general recognition. I own to liking better Matthew Arnold's simpler lines:—

Keep fresh the grass upon his grave,
 O Rotha, with thy living wave !

Despite the dislike of the motor-car one entertains as a pedestrian, you are apt to succumb to its lure in the Lake country. Certainly, by its means a great extent of ground can be traversed in a comparatively short time, and places may be seen that might not be visited otherwise, while a general idea of the topographical features of the region can be readily and—let me confess it—most pleasantly gained. I may outline a round we made one afternoon, though it may be scarcely intelligible without a map. Ascending the Troutbeck Valley from Windermere, we drove over the Kirkstone Pass to Patterdale, at the head of Lake Ullswater. We kept the west side of this beautiful lake for some

distance, catching a view of Striding Edge on Helvellyn and visiting Aira Force (or waterfall), and then crossed the moors by way of Matterdale to the Penrith and Keswick road. We followed this road to Threlkeld and then descended into the Vale of St. John, stopping at the King's Head at Thirlpost for tea. The homeward journey was by way of the east side of Lake Thirlmere and the base of Helvellyn and Dollywaggon Pike, and over Dunmail Raise to Grasmere and Ambleside. On another afternoon we had a similar long motor drive by Newby Bridge to the west side of Lake Coniston and on to Coniston and the Langdale Pikes. The scenery at Coniston Lake, with the heather and bracken of the fells, was more reminiscent of Scotland than anything we had seen in the Lake District. At Coniston itself we duly inspected John Ruskin's grave with its elaborate Celtic cross, and visited the Ruskin Museum, in many ways so reminiscent of the master of Brantwood, which we had observed across the lake. And there was some satisfaction in reaching the foot of the Langdale Pikes, on which we had longingly gazed every day of our stay. This was the last of our excursions, and it fittingly concluded our fortnight's visit to the Lake District, so abounding in loveliness, and now to us fragrant with most pleasing memories.