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THE ROMANTIC LAKES: FROM WORDSWORTH TO BEATRIX POTTER

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In 1726 Daniel Defoe published the third volume of *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*. He had begun the project four years earlier, describing a series of journeys, purportedly eyewitness accounts of the state of the nation from the pen of a man who could be described as the first modern journalist. There is in fact some uncertainty as to whether he undertook all the tours himself – some of his reports appear to be second-hand. But whether his source was his eyes, his ears or his reading, Defoe was unequivocal in his attitude to the English Lake District. He pronounced Westmorland to be ‘a country [county] eminent only for being the wildest, most barren and frightful of any that I have passed over in England, or even in Wales it self’. Worse even than Wales: imagine! ‘The west side, which borders on Cumberland,’ he continued, ‘is indeed bounded by a chain of almost unpassable mountains which, in the language of the country, are called Fells’. There is, says Defoe, but one word to sum up the landscape: ‘horror’. These Lakeland fells, he writes, have ‘no rich pleasant valleys between them, as among the Alps; no lead mines and veins of rich ore, as in the Peak; no coal pits, as in the hills about Hallifax, much less gold, as in the Andes, but all barren and wild, of no use or advantage either to man or beast’.¹ Note those terms *use* and *advantage*: Defoe was a man who believed in what we would now call the bourgeois or capitalist idea of getting on in the world, whether that meant mining for lead, coal and gold, or building a shelter and a fledgling economy like his Robinson Crusoe, or using your sex appeal to survive in a patriarchal society like his Moll Flanders.

The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, one of the foundational texts of the modern novel, had been published a few years earlier, in 1719. Crusoe is often described as the exemplar of economic man: with the assistance of a little slave labour from Friday, he shows that the bourgeois virtues of resilience, enterprise and hard work may enable a man to build a functioning economy even in the inhospitable environment of a desert island. He introduces British technology and agriculture to the island, and sets up a political structure with himself at the top. In the words of James Joyce, Crusoe is ‘the true prototype of the British colonist’, embodying the ‘whole Anglo-Saxon spirit’: ‘the manly independence, the unconscious cruelty, the persistence, the slow yet efficient intelligence, the sexual apathy, the calculating taciturnity’.² But the Lake District, Defoe – a Londoner and a businessman – implies in his *Tour*, has no such economic potential, indeed no value at all.

Fast forward two centuries and now nearly twenty million visitors per year visit the Lake District National Park, spending 1.4 billion pounds and supporting nearly twenty thousand jobs.³ How did we get from there to here? That is my theme today, and – if you have come to any of my first three lectures this season – you will not be surprised to hear that I will be arguing for William Wordsworth’s central place in the story. But it is a long and fascinating story, so I’ll also be providing you with snapshots of some other key players.

A clue as to the change in sensibility that led to the transformation of attitudes to the lakes and mountains of the north may be found in a different aspect of *Robinson Crusoe*, namely the way in which it works as a spiritual autobiography. Crusoe’s solitude among the forms of nature on his island leads him to contemplate God. The idea of finding God in nature was known at the time as ‘natural religion’ or ‘deism’. This contrasts with ‘revealed religion’, which comes from the personal encounter with Jesus. As a Puritan, Defoe believed that revealed faith was paramount; he did, however, recognize that, thanks to natural religion, even ‘savages’ such as Friday may have a sense of the divine. Crusoe makes it his business to build on this potential and convert Friday to his ‘revealed’



Christianity.⁴ Natural religion or Deism gathered pace as the eighteenth century unfolded, often as a middle-class reaction against the perceived danger of non-conformist – Puritan and, later, Methodist – zeal leading to disruption of the social order. Add to this the aesthetic revolution associated with the theory of the ‘sublime’ – the idea that ‘horror’ in the face of the awe-inspiring power of mountains, storms and wilderness might be both mentally stimulating and indeed an encounter with a divine force – and we find ourselves on the road to that aspect of Romanticism that has sometimes been described as ‘spilt religion’.

In 1753, a Cambridge-educated clergyman called John Brown, who came from Wigton in Cumberland, wrote a letter to Lord Lyttelton, which was published some years later under the title *Description of the Lake and Vale of Keswick*.⁵ ‘The full perfection of KESWICK’, he wrote ‘consists of three circumstances, *Beauty, Horror, and Immensity*, united’. ‘To give you a complete idea of these three perfections, as they joined in KESWICK,’ he continued, ‘would require the united powers of *Claude, Salvator, and Poussin*’. Claude Lorrain would ‘throw his delicate sunshine over the cultivated vales, the scattered cots, the groves, the lake, and wooded islands’; Salvator Rosa would ‘dash out the horror of the rugged cliffs, the steeps, the hanging woods, and foaming water-falls’: it would later become commonplace to associate Salvator with the wild sublime and Claude with the gentler idea of the beautiful. Poussin – Brown was probably thinking of Gaspard, not the more famous Nicolas – would fill in the mountains. As shorthand, we may say that this was the first occasion in which the Lake District was praised in the language of the sublime. And it is perhaps also the first occasion in which the Lake District is represented by means of an artistic comparison: the most admired classical landscape artists are invoked in order to suggest that it might be worth visiting the Lakes because that would be like looking at a real-life three-dimensional example of a great painting. And implicitly, the painter of the scenery is God. The aesthetic of the sublime, the connoisseurship of artistic taste, and the comfort of deism thus come together.

John Brown supplemented his modest clergyman’s stipend by serving as tutor to a gentleman in Carlisle called John Bernard Gilpin. Both Mr Gilpin and Dr Brown had artistic aspirations, which they duly passed on to one of the children, a boy called William Gilpin, who would grow up to develop a hugely influential theory for which he coined a new name. In his *Observations on the River Wye* of 1782 – the book that inspired Wordsworth to make the tour of the Wye that led him to write his greatest poem, ‘Tintern Abbey’ – Gilpin proposed that a ‘new object of pursuit’ for tourists: instead of inquiring into the culture of soils or the manners of men in the places they visited, they should ‘examine the face of a country *by the rules of picturesque beauty*’. William Gilpin had defined his term some years earlier, in an essay on prints and engravings: by ‘picturesque’ he meant, of course, ‘expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture’. Gilpin wrote the rulebook for Lake District tourists of the kind that outnumber those who go to walk the rugged fells. In 1786, he published *Observations relative to Picturesque Beauty made in 1772, on several parts of England; particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* in which his principles were applied to the landscape of the Lake District, thus encouraging more and more fashionable tourists to venture north.

Another key figure in our story is the Etonian poet Thomas Gray, most famous for his ‘Elegy written in a Country Churchyard’. He went on a tour of the Alps with his intimate school-friend Horace Walpole, son of the prime minister and inventor of eighteenth-century ‘Gothic’. There he was inspired by the sublime scenery and especially the setting of the monastery of the Grand Chartreuse, to which Wordsworth would later make a pilgrimage. ‘Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry’, wrote Gray, ‘There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument’.⁶ Note the elision here of religion and poetry: we are on another path, towards Matthew Arnold’s claim, in the face of science’s assault upon the old Biblical certainties about the age of the earth and the evolution of man, that there would come a time when all that shall remain of religion would be the poetry of it.

Back in England, Gray read Dr Brown’s essay on the glories of Keswick and decided to take a trip to the Lakes himself, in order to find some sublimity akin to that of the Alps much closer to home. He was duly impressed by Borrowdale and the craggy fells, but he also found gentler landscapes, approximating more to the beautiful than the sublime, especially in the vale of Grasmere:

The bosom of the mountains spreading here into a broad basin discovers in the midst Grasmere-water, its margin is hollowed into small bays, with bold eminences; some of them rocks, some of soft turf, that half conceal, and vary the figure of the little lake they command: from the shore a low promontory pushes



itself far into the water, and on it stands a white village with the parish church rising in the midst of it: hanging inclosures, corn-fields, and meadows green as an emerald, with their trees and hedges, and cattle, fill up the whole space from the edge of the water: and just opposite to you is a large farm-house at the bottom of a steep smooth lawn, embosomed in old woods, which climb half-way up the mountain's side, and discover above them a broken line of crags, that crown the scene. Not a single red tile, no flaring gentleman's house, or garden-walls, break in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise; but all is peace, rusticity, and happy poverty in its neatest, most becoming attire.⁷

This is the place that Wordsworth would come to call home, and where he would write much of his most memorable poetry. He would sympathise with many aspects of Gray's description: the paradise-like quality of the vale of Grasmere does indeed come from the harmony of its elements, the sense of a manageable scale to its mountain beauty, its blended colours and the integration of the buildings with their environment. But he dissented with a passion from the notion of 'happy poverty' – of the rural poor as no more than part of the picturesque scene. In his poetry, he would seek to find a voice for the old leech-gatherer, the destitute widow, the shepherd on the breadline.

Brown's influential description of the vale of Keswick, Gray's journal of his Lakeland tour and other key texts were gathered together in an appendix to the second edition of a book well-known to Wordsworth: Thomas West's *A Guide to the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire* (1778; expanded edition, 1780). This became *the* volume for fashionable travellers to pack in their baggage. Between them, Gilpin and West wrote the rulebook for Lake District tourists of the kind that outnumber those who go to walk the rugged fells. West provided a list of so-called 'stations', elevated points where you could stop your carriage and take in a view that was composed like a picture with a dark foreground, a sharp middle distance and a hazy horizon. Gilpin recommended to the use of a 'Claude glass', an oval-shaped pocket mirror to which various filters could be applied, so that you could turn your back on the landscape and capture the scene in such a way as to make it resemble a painting by Claude Lorrain. I see little difference between this and the modern phenomenon whereby a tourist coach will stop at a Lake District 'viewpoint' or 'beauty spot', and the party will tumble out, turn their backs on the view and picture themselves by means of their selfie-sticks.

The popularity of Lake District tourism was such that by 1797 a gentleman called James Plumptre was moved to write a play sanitising the phenomenon. *The Lakers* includes assorted local rustics (including a beggar and his dog), a pair of hikers (known as 'pedestrians' because they insist upon travelling on foot, not by carriage) and, in the central role, Miss Beccabunga Verojica, an avid amateur botanist. Little wonder that early in the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, published three years later, on the turn of the century, Wordsworth would write, adopting the voice of a local vicar:

“These Tourists, Heaven preserve us! needs must live
A profitable life: some glance along,
Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air,
And they were butterflies to wheel about
Long as their summer lasted; some, as wise,
Upon the forehead of a jutting crag
Sit perch'd, with book and pencil on their knee,
And look and scribble, scribble on and look,
Until a man might travel twelve stout miles,
Or reap an acre of his neighbour's corn.

What kind of economy do we now have, these lines ask, in which some people have the wealth and time to sit and idly sketch while others must go about their business and their labour? And what kind of 'profit' does such indulgence avail the human soul? Is picturesque tourism merely a middle-class indulgence? As W. H. Auden would put it in a poem written over a hundred years later, 'Am I to see in the Lake District, then, / Another bourgeois invention like the piano?' What Wordsworth sought to articulate was an alternative response to his native region from that espoused by the likes of Gilpin and West.



Pub quiz question: What was the most widely read work of the most admired English poet of the nineteenth century? It could hardly have been *The Prelude*, which lay unpublished in his lifetime. Nor was it *Lyrical Ballads*. Nor *The Excursion* nor his collected poems. Rather, it was a work that went under various different titles as it was reprinted in no fewer than ten editions in the first half-century of its life. It became commonly known as *A Guide to the Lakes*. It was, to quote Wordsworth's leading twentieth-century biographer Mary Moorman, 'more constantly in demand than any of his poetry'. Matthew Arnold once told a story about meeting a cleric who admired the *Guide* and asked if its author had written anything else.

The *Guide* was first written in the form of an introduction and accompanying text for the Rev. Joseph Wilkinson's *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, published in monthly parts in 1810 (and reissued, without Wordsworth's knowledge, with coloured versions of the engravings, in 1821). It first appeared under Wordsworth's name in 1820 in a book mostly written in verse: *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour & Julia: and Other Poems. To Which is annexed, A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes, in the North of England*. This edition carried an explanatory advertisement:

This Essay, which was first published several years ago as an Introduction to some Views of the Lakes, by the Rev. Joseph Wilkinson, (an expensive work, and necessarily of limited circulation,) is now, with emendations and additions, attached to these volumes; from a consciousness of its having been written in the same spirit which dictated several of the poems, and from a belief that it will tend materially to illustrate them.

It first appeared independently as *A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in The North of England* in 1822, in an edition of 500 copies which was exhausted immediately and reprinted with some revisions the following year in an edition of a thousand. The 1822 edition included a new account of an excursion up Scafell Pike and the 1823 added an account of an excursion to Ullswater – both were based closely and without acknowledgement on unpublished material by Dorothy Wordsworth. Then the *Guide* appeared in 1835 under the auspices of a Kendal publisher (previous editions having been published in London), with the title *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England, with a Description of the Scenery, etc. For the Use of Tourists and Residents. Fifth Edition, with considerable additions*. In this edition, the 'Directions and Information for the Tourist' became a separate prefatory division, set apart from the main body of the text, which by this time had three principal sections, 'View of the country as formed by nature', 'Aspect of the country, as affected by its inhabitants', and 'Changes, and rules of taste for preventing their bad effects'. Wordsworth began this edition by saying that his purpose was 'to furnish a Guide or Companion for the *Minds* of Persons Of taste, and feeling for Landscape, who might be inclined to explore the District of the Lakes with that degree of attention to which its beauty may fairly lay claim', but that he would begin by getting out of the way 'the humble and tedious Task of supplying the Tourist With directions'.

Then in 1842 it became part of *A Complete Guide to the Lakes, Comprising Minute Directions for the Tourist, With Mr Wordsworth's Description of the Scenery of the Country, etc. And Three Letters on the Geology of the Lake District, by the Rev. Professor Sedgwick, Edited by the Publisher* (i.e. John Hudson Of Kendal). Wordsworth explained in a letter to Adam Sedgwick, the first Woodwardian Professor of Geology in the University of Cambridge, that in the tourist market his guide was being outsold by others which attended more to the needs of 'the *Body* of the Tourist', that he had tried to remedy this defect but found the work troublesome and 'infra dig.', and that he had therefore turned the 'guide matter' over to the publisher Hudson, who had undertaken to interweave it with further matter compiled by himself but to leave 'all that related to mind' entire and separate from the rest. In addition, Thomas Gough of Kendal would 'promote the Botany' (he furnished a table listing the woods and fells where some 250 species of plant could be found). Thus with Sedgwick's geological contribution, 'a Book would be produced answering every purpose that could be desired'. This version went through five editions in seventeen years; Sedgwick added a fourth letter on geology to the 1846 edition and an extremely important fifth one to that of 1853. There was a consonance between poet and scientist: for Sedgwick, as for Wordsworth, the mountains 'give back to us, as the earth's touch did of old to the giant's body, new spirits and enduring strength.' The allusion is to the story of Antaeus, a myth about the need to keep in touch with the earth.

A text that began as accompaniment to the productions of a clergyman cashing in on the vogue for the picturesque eventually became accompanied by the productions of a clergyman who was one of the crucial figures in the



history of the science of geology. The textual morphology of the *Guide* is a fascinating index of the shift from the age of Gilpin and West to that of Lyell and Darwin. Sedgwick actually used the opportunity provided by Wordsworth to contribute to that highly significant nineteenth-century genre, the self-consciously popularizing work on geology:

I wish to address more general readers – any intelligent traveller whose senses are open to the beauties of the country around him, and who is ready to speculate on such matters of interest as it offers to him. I will therefore endeavour to avoid technical language as far as I am able, and I do not profess to teach, in a few pages, the geology of a most complicated country (for that would be an idle attempt); but rather to open the mind to the nature of the subject, and to point out the right way towards a comprehension of some of its general truths.

It is no exaggeration to say that the name and nature of the Silurian and Cambrian systems gained currency outside scientific circles chiefly because of Sedgwick's letters in the *Guide*. And in the case of the 1853 edition, the *Guide* was used by Sedgwick for the statement of his case in his great dispute with Sir Roderick Murchison over the latter's fallacious extension of his Silurian system into 20,000 feet of strata which did not belong to it.

In addition to its picturesque and geological functions, the *Guide* served as a complement to one of Wordsworth's most favourably received poetic productions, his poems on the river Duddon, even as it continued to be a pocket companion for tourists in the tradition of Thomas West. Wordsworth's book was, however, unlike earlier guides in that it did far more than offer what he called tedious 'guide matter': it used the popular guidebook format to put Wordsworth's own concerns across to the public. In particular, whereas West and his followers all wrote exclusively for visitors to the Lakes, Wordsworth aimed to show what it meant to dwell there. It is symptomatic that in writing of the rootedness of Lakeland cottages Wordsworth included some lines of verse from the unpublished manuscript of *Home at Grasmere*, a poem cardinal to his sense of himself as a dweller in Westmorland. Where earlier guide writers adopted the picturesque tourist's point of view and rarely descended from their stations, Wordsworth's approach was holistic: he moved from nature to the natives, exploring the relationship between land and inhabitant; then in his third section he considered the evolving and increasingly disruptive influence of man on his environment. Sedgwick's contribution rendered the text more holistic still, in that the letters on geology supplemented the Wordsworthian analysis of the surfaces of nature and the interaction between man and nature with an account of the depths of nature, of the fossil record which revealed 'countless ages before man's being' and taught 'of laws as unchangeable as the oracles of nature'.⁸ By the time we reach this edition we have come a long way from Thomas West and his attempt to make a visit to the Lakes comparable to the composition of a landscape painting. The geologist's hammer has replaced the Claude glass.

Throughout the *Guide*, people are seen firmly in relation to their material environment. Among Wordsworth's chief concerns are the management of trees and the architecture of rural buildings. Section First of the *Guide*, 'View of the country as formed by nature', begins with Wordsworth taking the reader to an imaginary station on a cloud midway between Great Gable and Scafell, from where the eight valleys of the Lake District may be seen stretched out like spokes from the nave of a wheel. By substituting an imaginary station for an actual one, Wordsworth differentiates his *Guide* from those intended only for the bodies of tourists; with the image of the wheel, he introduces the idea of a unified place with a common centre. The remainder of Section First develops this sense of the unity of the country as formed by nature. Mountains, vales, and lakes all work together; even the humble tarn makes a necessary contribution to the whole: 'In the economy of Nature these are useful, as auxiliaries to Lakes; for if the whole quantity of water which falls upon the mountains in time of storm were poured down upon the plains without intervention ... the habitable grounds would be much more subject than they are to inundation' (p. 39). Thomas West never seemed to notice tarns, presumably because he did not deem them either picturesque or sublime. Where other guides concerned themselves with how the more majestic lakes contributed to the charm of a scene, Wordsworth's was interested in the function performed within the ecosystem by the smaller and higher bodies of still water. In Section Second, the native inhabitants of the district are seen to share in this natural unity. 'The economy of Nature' and the human economy are brought together as the hand of man is 'incorporated with and subservient to the powers and processes of Nature' (p. 61). Man works in partnership with his environment. Thus Lakeland cottages may be said rather 'to have grown than to have been erected;— to have risen, by an instinct of their own, out of the native rock'; the buildings 'in their very form call to mind the processes of Nature' and thus 'appear to be received into the bosom of the living principle of things' (pp. 62-3).



Not even the places dedicated to Christian worship violate the *religio loci*. A consequence of such integration with nature is an integrated social structure: until recently there has been ‘a perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturists, among whom the plough of each man was confined to the maintenance of his own family, or to the occasional accommodation of his neighbour’ (p. 67). There was no nobleman, knight, or squire; the ruling power was nature, not some human overlord. Here Wordsworth, alert to the region’s distinctively democratic form of land tenure, describes the district of the Lakes as an ‘almost visionary mountain republic’ (p. 68).

But all this has changed as a result of influx and innovation, the subject of Section Third of the *Guide*. New residents who are not rooted in the land have brought dissonant new building styles; worse, in accordance with the ‘craving for prospect’, their new houses have been built on obtrusive sites where they do not ‘harmonize with the forms of Nature’. The rage for picturesque ‘improvement’ has resulted in the alteration of the contours of the principal island on Windermere lake: ‘Could not the margin of this noble island be given back to Nature?’ asks Wordsworth, very much in the tone of a modern conservationist (p. 72). Worst of all is the introduction of larch plantations. Wordsworth makes a powerful distinction between the way in which nature forms woods and forests, a gradual and selective process shaped by conditions of soil, exposure to wind, and so on, and the environmentally and aesthetically harmful practices of artificial planting.

The new proprietors and tourists will not go away; the function of the *Guide* is to educate them to care for the delicate ecosystem, as we would now call it, of the Lakes. ‘In this wish,’ Wordsworth concludes Section Third, ‘the author will be joined by persons of pure taste throughout the whole island, who, by their visits (often repeated) to the Lakes in the North of England, testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy’ (p. 92). In that phrase ‘a sort of national property’ may be seen the origins of the National Trust and the Lake District National Park.

The key figure in this history was the Wordsworthian-Ruskinian, Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley. In 1883, taking his cue from a battle in which Wordsworth had fought in the 1840s, he launched a campaign against a Bill for the extension of the railway into the heart of the Lakes. He established a Lake District Defence Society and fought not only against the railway but for the establishment of public footpath rights. He gained support from the social reformer Octavia Hill, to whom he had been introduced by Ruskin, and Robert Hunter of the Commons Preservation Society, a group in the vanguard of the open space movement which was agitating for the preservation of green land in and around London. In 1895 Rawnsley, Hill, and Hunter had ‘The National Trust for Places Of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty’ registered as a charity. The whole concept of a place of ‘Natural Beauty’ was bound up with the Romantic tradition and the Lake District. The trigger for the public meeting at which the formation of the Trust was first discussed had been the news that a number of sites in the Lakes, including the Falls of Lodore immortalized by Southey and Wordsworth, were up for sale. Among the Trust’s early acquisitions were Brandelhow Park and Grange Fell on Derwentwater, Queen Adelaide’s Hill on Windermere, Gowbarrow Park on Ullswater – the very place where Wordsworth saw the daffodils, and Burrows Field near Ambleside. In its annual report of 1904 the Trust picked up on Wordsworth’s idea of ‘a sort of national property’ and advocated the creation of a National Park in the heart of the Lake District, though it was not until the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 that this was actually established.

The 1949 Act drew together conservation, planning, and access. It was based on the recommendations of a committee set up in 1947 under Sir Arthur Hobhouse; that committee had accepted the definition of a National Park propounded in the Dower Report of 1945: an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which for the nation’s benefit and by appropriate national decision and action, (a) the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved, (b) access and facilities for public open air enjoyment are amply provided, (c) wildlife and buildings and places Of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected, while (d) established farming use is effectively maintained. Each element of this definition may be traced back to the values of Wordsworth’s *Guide*: the maintaining of the place for the benefit of the whole nation; the conception of landscape beauty, With a particular emphasis on Wild (sublime) country; the belief in the importance of the open air; the respect for buildings that have a history in the place; and the recognition that traditional agricultural practices are integral to the identity of the place. Wordsworth would have been pleased that shepherds still work on the hills of Westmorland and Cumberland, since, in contrast to the American model, the English and Welsh National Parks do not consist of enclosed areas owned by the government; the land in them remains privately owned — a considerable amount of it by the National Trust, which remains a private charity and may be used for commercial



activities such as farming and forestry. Conservation is sought by means of planning rather than possession. All who walk in the National Parks are legatees of Wordsworth, his sister and his friends, who derived so much of their spiritual nourishment from walking and looking in the way that is suggested by such entries in Dorothy's journals as the following:

William had slept very ill — he was tired and had a bad headache. We walked around the two lakes. Grasmere was very soft and Rydale was extremely beautiful from the pasture side. Nab Scar was just topped by a cloud which cutting it off as high as it could be cut off made the mountain look uncommonly lofty. We sate down a long time in different places.'

* * *

Whenever Canon Rawnsley made the case for the preservation of the Lake District, he cited the example of Wordsworth. The dedication to one of his books is characteristic: 'to my friend and fellow-labourer William Henry Hills, who has done more than any man in the district, to keep our English Lakeland, undisfigured, and "secure from rash assault", for the health, rest, and inspiration of the people'. Here the quotation from Wordsworth's 'Sonnet on the projected Kendal and Windermere Railway' is a fixed point of reference: 'Is then no nook of English ground / Secure from rash assault?' For Rawnsley, there is no contradiction between opposing the extension of the railway into the Lakes and the idea that the Lakes belong to 'the people'. Like Wordsworth, it was to the rash assault that he objected. This is an important point, because Wordsworth's concern for the preservation of the Lakes has often been put down to a selfish desire to keep away artisan day-trippers from Manchester. But in his 1844 letters to the *Morning Post* concerning the projected Kendal and Windermere Railway, Wordsworth's principal objection was to large-scale organized Sunday outings:

Packing off men after this fashion, for holiday entertainment, is, in fact, treating them like children. They go at the will of their master, and must return at the same, or they will be dealt with as transgressors ... Let [the Master-manufacturers] consent to a 'Ten Hours' Bill, with little or, if possible, no diminution of wages, and the necessaries of life being more easily procured, the mind will develop itself accordingly, and each individual would be more at liberty to make at his own cost excursions in any direction which might be most inviting to him. There would then be no need for their masters sending them in droves scores of miles from their homes and families to the borders of Windermere, or anywhere else.

It is precisely this problem of mass tourism that threatens the Lake District today, though ironically the rash assault comes from cars and coaches, not the railway. Changing historical conditions bring different methods of putting ideals into practice: in the nineteenth century the railway represented a threat and there was a need for the protective demarcation of 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty', whereas now the railway is back in environmental favour and some conservationists advocate the abolition of the National Park system on the grounds that the whole country should be subject to the stringent planning regulations that apply in the Parks.

The key challenge facing those who own and those who manage the Lake District today – predominantly the National Park authority and the biggest landowner, namely the National Trust – is the reconciliation of the tourist industry with the preservation of the way of life that has shaped the very landscape and culture of the region. The life, that is to say, of the hill farmer. Those mountainsides around Grasmere lake are not naturally smooth and green. They have been nibbled into that lovely condition by generous flocks of Herdwick sheep. Without the hill farmers they would swiftly revert to bracken and wildwood.

The person who did more than anyone else to recognize that the preservation of the Lake District as a place of outstanding beauty is as much about people as landscape was Canon Rawnsley's friend, Beatrix Potter. She used her substantial inheritance and the royalties from her little books (not to mention the merchandising that went with them) to purchase more and more parcels of land in the Lakes. She expanded the holding of Hill Top farm, so close to the village of Hawkshead where Wordsworth went to school, then in 1923 purchased Troutbeck Park Farm, bringing her two thousand acres and a flock of prize Herdwick sheep. She duly became a prize-winning breeder and a hugely respected figure within the tough-minded Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association. In 1930, she was able to afford the Monk Coniston estate, another four thousand acres in the beautiful Langdale valley going towards Coniston, once home to the Victorian sage John Ruskin – another key figure in my story, but one



whom I have not had time to talk about today. She passed on half the estate to the National Trust at cost price, and vowed to gift the rest of it in her will. A key stipulation when she died and left all her land to the National Trust was that it should not be parcelled out for bungalows and holiday homes. The Trust's website tells us that she left them fourteen farms, all of which 'are still working farms managed by National Trust tenant farmers, in accordance with her wishes, and we continue her conservation work in the Lake District to this day'.⁹ This is true, though many local Herdwick farmers were very concerned a couple of years ago when the Trust bought the land of Thorneythwaite hill farm in Borrowdale, but not its farmhouse.¹⁰ The future of Lake District hill farming remains very uncertain – not least in the immediate years ahead when EU agricultural subsidies for environmentally-friendly farming will presumably disappear. Let us hope that the spirit of Wordsworth, of Canon Rawnsley and of Beatrix Potter will live on and secure the survival of this very special place and way of life.

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REFERENCE NOTES

¹ <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Defoe/34>.

² Lecture (in Italian) by Joyce on Defoe at Università Popolare, Trieste, March 1912.

³ Lakedistrict.gov.uk.

⁴ This development is made explicit in chapter 4 of 'Robinson Crusoe's Vision of the Angelic World' in Defoe's sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719):

To avoid all needless distinctions, what persons in the God-head exercise the creating, and what the governing power, I offer that glorious text, *Psal. xxiii. 6.* where the whole Trinity is entitled to the whole creating work: and, therefore, in the next place, I shall lay down these two propositions.

I. *That the eternal God guides, by his providence, the whole universe, which was created by his power.*

II. *That this providence manifests a particular care over, and concern in, the governing and directing man, the most noble creature upon earth.*

It is plain, that natural religion proves the first, by intimating the necessity of a providence guiding and governing the world, from the consequence of the wisdom, justice, prescience, and goodness of the Almighty Creator: for otherwise it would be absurd to think, that God should create a world, without any care or providence over it, in guiding the operations of nature, so as to preserve the order of his creation.

Revealed religion gives us a light into the care and concern of his providence, by the climate's being made habitable, the creatures subjected and made nourishing, and all vegetative life made medicinal; and all this for the sake of man, who is made viceroy to the King of the earth.

⁵ Published in the *London Chronicle*, 24-26 April 1766, then as a pamphlet (Newcastle, 1767) that was reprinted several times.

⁶ Letter to Richard West, 16 Nov 1739.

⁷ *The Poems and Letters of Thomas Gray* (1820), pp. 362-3.

⁸ 1853 edn, p. 219. Other quotations from *Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes. The Fifth Edition (1835)*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1906, repr. 1977).

⁹ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/beatrix-potter-gallery-and-hawkshead/features/beatrix-potter-the-lake-district-and-the-national-trust>.

¹⁰ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/thorneythwaite-farm-statement>.