

Wordsworth as a Pioneer in the Science of Scenery.¹

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THE pre-eminence of Wordsworth as a poet of Nature has long been recognised, but there is another aspect of his originality which has not yet received adequate recognition. Wordsworth wrote "A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England with a Description of the Scenery," which appeared in several editions between 1810 and 1835. The "Guide" proper is brief, the author regarding this portion of his task as "humble and tedious," and he soon plunges into his description of the scenery. Here at once we find scientific originality, for he not only records physical appearances, but also, whenever they give keen enjoyment, seeks the source of the impression, investigating both the objective conditions and the mental qualities concerned in their appreciation. Moreover, he writes in the hope that his essay may lead to habits of "more considerate observation than have been hitherto applied to local scenery."

Consideration saved Wordsworth from the sentimental assumption that the aspect of Nature is always harmonious. He points out, for example, a 'defect' in the colouring of the Country of the Lakes. But his faculty of observation made him quick to recognise the conditions in which objects in the view enhance one another, the harmonies which are the true beauties of scenery. Thus he directs attention to the circumstance that the radial arrangement of the English Lakes from a mountainous centre introduces every variety of the sun's shadowing. He points out that the mountains of the district differ from hills not merely in mass but quality, owing to the atmospheric absorption which etherealises the summit when viewed from the valley. He notes the height which must be attained that "compact fleecy clouds" should settle upon the crest. Among "the varied solemnities of the night" he recognises the singular charm of stars which "take their stations above the hill tops"—an excellent observation of enhancement due to a momentary and accidental relation. He feels the romantic, almost poignant interest of the line of the trees which maintain themselves against the elements at the limit of altitude. The charm of intermingling of field and woodland in the Lake Country he traces skilfully to the progressive agricultural settlement which followed "the veins of richer, dryer, or less stony soil." With equal acuteness he indicates how the peculiar economic character of the district has resulted in innumerable lanes and paths which provide the rambler with "an ever ready guide" to "the hidden treasure of its landscapes."

Although preferring the harmonies of occupation and environment displayed in a highland community of small owners before all other aspects of the scenery of civilisation, Wordsworth pays discriminating tribute to the unique contribution made by wealthy inheritors of landed estate in the preservation of trees beyond economic prime for sheer love of their beauty in venerable age. He notes the geological conditions to which the water of the English Lakes owes the remarkable clearness that makes their depths a magic mirror to lead the mind into "recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable." He does not, however, discover the peculiarities of the watery image which are the source of this mental effect. We must remember that Wordsworth was making a beginning only in the science of scenery, and that with the

advantage of another hundred years of accumulated knowledge we can better his instruction. But even so it is remarkable that we should now be taking up the aesthetics of scenery very nearly from the point where he left it, joining hands across a hundred years, rather than proceeding from the mainly orographical studies of scenery produced in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The "Guide" proper and the "Description" are followed by the third section of the book, which is on "Changes, and rules of taste for preventing their bad effects." Wordsworth dates a more general appreciation of the wilder aspects of scenery from about the year 1775. Thereafter the country of the English Lakes not only attracted visitors, but also, owing to its economic conditions, offered more opportunities for settlement by villa residents than districts parcelled out in great estates. The epoch of railway construction followed, with the result that the changes in the English Lake District in Wordsworth's middle and later life were comparable to those which, owing to the development of motor traffic and the extension of house building, now affect rural England as a whole. Wordsworth points out to the newly-arrived resident that the liking for "strong lines of demarcation" and emphatic contrast is due to want of practice, and that if he will pause to study his rural surroundings "a new habit of pleasure will be formed the opposite of this, arising out of the perception of the fine gradations by which in Nature one thing passes away into another." The rule that a house situated in mountain scenery should be so designed as to take its place quietly in the landscape is enforced by the penetrating remark that owing to the scale of the view "a mansion can never become principal in the landscape" as it may "where mountains subside into hills of moderate elevation."

This example of Wordsworth's *flair* for noting the relation of the object of attention to its environment is curiously paralleled by his observation of the effect of the echo of the cuckoo's call from the steep sides of the Rydal Valley. The sound, he says "takes possession" of the valley, an expression which is implicit with suggestion of the important fact that the view is made impressive by any agent which imparts unity to objects the multiplicity of which often prevents the landscape from appearing to the mind as a picture. Here I pause to remark that the sounds and scents of the countryside belong to its scenery. If we did not make the letter *c* soft in the word scenery we should be less apt to forget that the word has no derivational connexion with 'seeing.' The visual is no doubt the leading aspect of scenery, but aesthetically we are bound to take account of the simultaneous impression of the natural environment, or scene, upon the other senses. It follows that the societies which concern themselves with the preservation of scenic beauty are within their province in combating unnecessary mechanical noise.

When changes come, Wordsworth is not always apt in recognising a new harmony. His failure to observe the rhythmic reinforcement of rocky pinnacles by trees of pointed form diminishes the efficacy of his protest against the introduction of the larch. His preference for informal lines may have been partly innate but was increased out of measure by intellectual associations, which do so much to cramp the proper functioning of the eye. Thus in the letter to Sir George Beaumont, dealing with the laying-out of grounds, written so early as 1805, which is included as

¹ Paper read at the Conference of Delegates of Corresponding Societies of the British Association, session of Sept. 11, dealing with the scenery of the English Lake District and its preservation.

an appendix in Mr. de Selincourt's recent collation of the editions of the "Guide," Wordsworth assumes that every person of taste would prefer that the whole garden should be as near to Nature as possible, and pays no regard to the circumstance that in the immediate vicinity of the mansion it is permissible to prefer formal lines on account of their harmony with those of architecture. Thus, although Wordsworth may have been in advance of his time as an advocate of the free play of the senses, he did not go so far as we now know to be desirable.

Mr. de Selincourt has included as a second appendix letters to the *Morning Post* written by Wordsworth in 1844 on the subject of the proposed Kendal and Windermere Railway. Descending to the dusty arena of practical affairs, his academic mind loses something of its lofty detachment. It is interesting to compare these letters with a recent work entitled "England and the Octopus," dealing with the things that to-day impair the peacefulness of our scenery. The style of Wordsworth is indeed less trenchant than that of Mr. Clough Williams-Ellis, but underlying exasperation is

almost equally evident. On the whole, however, it is when Wordsworth is dealing with general principles that he is of most service to the cause which so many of us have at heart, the preservation of scenic beauty, and we may well take the concluding paragraph of his "Description" as the text of our present appeal for preservation of scenic amenity in the countryside generally and the district of the English Lakes in particular:

"It is then much to be wished that a better taste should prevail among these new proprietors; and, as they cannot be expected to leave things to themselves, that skill and knowledge should prevent unnecessary deviations from that path of simplicity and beauty along which, without design and unconsciously, their humble predecessors have moved. In this wish 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."

Jubilee Congress of the Folk-lore Society.

THE Jubilee Congress of the Folk-lore Society was held, as previously announced, on Sept. 19-25 in London, the president being the veteran scholar, Lieut.-Col. Sir Richard C. Temple. With the exception of one session on the evening of Sept. 20, which was held at the Imperial Institute, the meetings were held in the rooms of the Society of Antiquaries, which had been placed at the disposal of the congress by the Council of that body.

The congress, though small in numbers, was distinguished in its membership, and a number of prominent folk-lorists from abroad were present, mostly representing continental or American bodies. Among them were Dr. Fritz Boehm, of Berlin, representing the Vereins für Volkerkunde; Dr. Gudmund Schütte, of Sweden; Miss A. W. Beckwith, representing the Folk-lore Foundation of Vassar College, N.Y.; Dr. Marcu Beza, of the Rumanian Academy; Prof. Y. M. Goblet, of the Société Ernest Renan, Paris; Prof. R. Pettazoni, of the Universities of Rome and Bologna; and Dr. Rüttimeyer, of the Schweitzer Gesellschaft für Volkerkunde. A number of British societies were also officially represented.

It may not be inopportune to recall that when the Folk-lore Society was founded in 1878 by a small band of enthusiasts, among whom the late William J. Thoms and the late Mr. (afterwards Sir) Laurence Gomme were the leading spirits, the subject of its study had hardly won a generally recognised name. There would also seem to have been no very precise agreement as to its exact object and scope. So much so that, even in a leaflet published on behalf of the Society some years later, it was felt necessary to explain in what respects the science of folk-lore differed and was distinguishable from other studies with which it was in danger of being confused. The reason for this, of course, was that the Society had not confined itself to the study of survivals among civilised populations and the collection of folk-tales, but had included the study of certain aspects of 'savage' culture within its scope, and might, therefore, have been thought to be encroaching too broadly upon the province of ethnography.

On many occasions Sir Laurence Gomme in his writings, and notably before the Anthropological Section of the British Association, endeavoured to lay down the line of demarcation of his studies. Although the lines may have been overstepped, in general and as a matter of practice the Society's

field of operations has been well marked out. Its original aim was two-fold: the collection of the customs, beliefs, sayings, etc., of the folk, and secondly, the classification, comparison, and interpretation of the matter thus collected. A valuable handbook for collectors was prepared which has been revised as the development of the study has required, and the work of the Society has been recorded in a journal which has been supplemented by the publication of supplementary volumes, either original studies too lengthy for inclusion in the journal or reprints of 'classics' of folk-lore almost unobtainable in their original or indeed in any form.

It is worth while to recall these facts in connexion with this congress, for it cannot but be felt that the Society and the study it represents are not receiving in this jubilee year the support from the public which they deserve. The study of folk-lore was taken up with some vigour on the Continent, where the term, first used by W. J. Thoms and adopted in England to distinguish the subject, was accepted as the official designation of the study of the culture of the people.

The recognition that is now accorded such studies on the Continent is indicated by a communication presented to the congress by Dr. Fritz Boehm, in which he surveyed the academic position of folk-lore in Germany. In Prussia folk-lore, since the educational reform of 1925, is being introduced into the curricula of the elementary school, the secondary school, and the university, and other States will probably follow this example. In fact, it is represented in some form or other in most German universities. Yet Dr. Boehm lamented the fact that Germany is behind Scandinavia in this respect, as was in part borne out by Dr. A. Cyriax's account of the study of folk-lore and art in Sweden and the museums devoted to it. While this is not the occasion to enlarge upon such reflections as this contrast with conditions in Great Britain may suggest, it is perhaps worth while to point out that, though the important work of collection must not be neglected now that the material is disappearing more rapidly than ever in the stress of modern life, too little attention may be given to the work of analysis, synthesis, and comparison which gives meaning to the isolated facts and keeps alive the interest of an intelligent but uninstructed public.

Turning to the proceedings of the congress, it is gratifying to observe that so far as the number and