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A HOLIDAY AMONGST THE LAKES.

By C. F. BENSON.

A DAY ON THE BUTTERMERE FELLS.

“A HOLIDAY among the Lakes—far from the smoke and din and wear and tear of London. There is health in the very thought, and body and mind grow strong in anticipation.”

Thus Professor Tyndall in the middle of the last century. Hundreds now visit the Lake District to every individual in those days. Quite a number of people have a bowing acquaintance with the Lakeland Fells. Every year a stream of tourists flows round the Lakes—on foot, on cycles, in coaches, in motors (which latter may Alastor confound), trickles over sundry of the passes, and even splashes the summits. They go the regulation drives, ascend the regulation fells by the regulation routes, make the regulation remarks on the regulation scenery, mist and rain permitting, and go away under the impression that they know the Lakes. They do not. “To enjoy the English Lakes we should live among them, study them, watch their varying moods and changing features, make friends with the rocks and peaks, and fells and scars. They will never prove false; and when you know them and appreciate their constancy and never ageing beauty, you will go again and again to throw yourself at their feet, learning something at every visit and never wearying of your choice? This passage does not come from Professor Tyndall, or even from Ruskin, though it very well might, but from a popular guidebook, and, in spite of its relatively humble origin, it is very true.

The Lake District is volcanic in its origin. “Once upon a time, a great many hundreds of thousands of years ago, there

above Crummock Water, Boardale, on Ullswater, Barden (Boardale) on the Wharfe, and numerous Wildboar Cloughs amongst the Pennines. In Scotland we have the same animal indicated in the Brig of Turc, and again in Ireland in Torc Mountain, Killarney.

Buttermere is a beautiful little valley, very happily combining softness and severity. Even Robinson, from this side as common looking a fell as its name is commonplace, fails to mar the scenery, for the road passes so close under it that only the lower slopes can be seen. These are abundantly and gracefully wooded, with crags scattered here and there along the skyline in bold contrast.

Our hotel was full to overflowing, literally. I was one of the overflow, and had to sleep out. We saw each other at breakfast and dinner. We found we were birds of passage, anglers, and climbers. The birds of passage fluttered feebly around, and, I believe, returned to lunch and afternoon tea. The anglers were as man's love is to man's life. Their reserve, however, was palliated, inasmuch as it was currently reported that they supplied the trout we had for breakfast. This was a delusion: I met those trout one morning in a basket coming up from Crummock Water where they had been netted. The climbers were looked on as natural curiosities, whom, for their madness, the Genius of the Everlasting Hills had condemned to climb mountains by the most impossible routes—to do, in the words of an Alpine Club man, the right thing the wrong way.

Is rock-climbing a legitimate sport, or is it, as some maintain, unjustifiably risking the life God has given you? It must be remembered, however, that these have seldom any practical knowledge of what they are talking about.

“To really enjoy mountaineering,” it has been humorously written, “you must have no mere commonplace, practical object in view. You must leave every path that common sense, custom, or the average mountain sheep is likely to point out, and, going in some other direction, climb merely for the sake of climbing. You do not climb to get anywhere, but

merely to climb. If when climbing you strike on an easy way to the top, you must go in some other direction where the chances appear to be in favour of breaking your neck. Do aught else and you lack the soul of a climber. For you the Alps is a closed book, and even the Dolomites in the Austrian Tyrol an unattainable ecstasy. The very essence of climbing is to be in extreme discomfort and constant danger."

That there is an element of danger in climbing it would be idle to deny. On the other hand it is equally idle to deny that care and skill can and do reduce that danger to a minimum, though never to a negligible quantity, for the moment danger on rock is regarded as negligible, it *ipso facto* assumes terrible proportions. As a matter of fact climbing by skilled mountaineers is about as dangerous as hunting in a fair country. Difficult mountaineering is for the unskilled about as dangerous as riding a vicious horse in a steeplechase for a man who has not learnt to ride. Only if a skilled horseman gets a toss and breaks his back, people say, "How sad!" whereas if a man gets killed on the crags, the papers are flooded with torrents of hostile criticism denouncing the criminal, the suicidal folly of the pursuit.

On Tuesday morning three doughty cragsmen set off to attempt something new, accompanied by others who were just going to have a look at things. I know what having a look at things means—to me, and enjoy it, but they had arrived two days previously and had been getting fit ever since. I recollected the words of wisdom, viz., that if men rush, straight from the desk in a crowded city with unseasoned lungs and muscles, to attack severe climbs, frightful accidents are certain to occur, and determined not to furnish an object lesson in my proper person, wherefore I decided, with my comrade-in-arms, on a preliminary grind over Red Pike.

We passed between the lakes. On our left lay Buttermere, a dark, clear, unruffled (to the annoyance of the anglers) mirror. On our right, a short half-mile distant, Crummock Water, owing to some eccentricity of mountain weather was all asparkle with sunlight, and adance with waves. The air

stood on the site of Castle Head, Derwentwater, a considerable volcano, some six or seven thousand feet high. One day after the fashion of its kind, it blew its head off, tore itself to pieces, and distributed its interior round about the countryside promiscuously. Then came the glaciers, grooving their way to the sea through the scattered ash by sheer and tremendous weight, and crushing the landscape into the deep valleys and fantastic ridges which, weathered and waterworn, form the present Lake District.

After the passing of the glaciers the scene must have been inexpressibly desolate, until artistic nature came and clothed the hills with grass and heather, embroidered their skirts with varied and graceful foliage, threaded them with delicate strands of silver ghylls, and decked them with lakes of sapphire. Later, also in time immemorial, came man and built impossible stone walls at impossible angles all over the fells."

I knew all this when I started for the Lakes one recent Whitsuntide, because the words are taken from a book of my own, written five years previously, but I did not know, when I wrote that book, the history of those stone walls, which is not without interest. Formerly the Lake District was chiefly the property of the Church, the Abbots of Furness and St. Bees being the principal landowners. The land was allotted, or dealt out to the tenants, and here we come to the origin of the modern word, Dalesmen. Our "deal" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *dæl* (share), and the men who held these deals, or allotments, were the *Dælmen*. The term *dalt*, still used in the north for a tenement of land, would seem to have the same origin. Traces of these allotments (*intacks*) can still be seen in the stone walls that creep over the fellsides, originally built not only as boundaries, but to keep out wild swine and other destructive creatures. . Incidentally, to judge from place names, the wild boar must have been abundant all over the north. Witness *Grise* (boar), *dale Pike*, near Keswick, *Grisdale* Pass between *Patterdale* and *Grasmere*, *Mungrisdale*, near *Carrick*, *Grassmoor* (quite probably a corruption of *Grisemoor*),

was soft and fragrant with the breath of the dales, but I missed the flowers. I have seen the ground at Whitsuntide so thickly covered with harebells and hyacinth that it was all a blue flush, with the grass as only a delicate undercarpeting of green.

"The spirit of God," reads the Ruskin memorial on Friars Crag, Derwentwater, "is around you, in the air you breathe, His glory in the light you see, and in the fruitfulness of the earth and the joy of His creatures. He has written for you day by day His revelation, and He has granted you day by day your daily bread." Joyfully and thankfully were we conscious of the deep truth of these words as we passed through the pleasant woodland, alive with bird songs. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come." Further on, near Scale Force, we found primroses in profusion, scattered among the rocks in garlands and posies most delightful to the eye, but the winter was not past, as we were to discover ere we were many hours older.

There was a considerable body of water coming down the fall, so that the force, contradictory though it sounds, was not at its best. The happiest conditions under which to visit this little ravine is in bright dry weather, when a westerly gale is blowing. Then the wind, caught and concentrated by the containing walls, holds back the slender stream and blows it into spray, so that the fall is all a veil of thinnest lawn through which transient rainbows lighten and pass like smiles. The sides of the fissure are richly clothed with ferns and mosses which harmonise tenderly with the soft greys and reds of the rock.

Red Pike is a syenite mountain, beautiful to look from, and, from the north and west, beautiful to look at. From the east it is somewhat dwarfed by High Stile, and the southern side has but little elegance of shape, though want of form is largely compensated by the rich colouring of the scree that sweep down into Ennerdale.

Noteworthy is it that iron, the emblem of strength and durability, is a sure sign of rotteness in rock. Those red

tints that adorn the Buttersec Rothhorn (as our Swiss friends call it) warn the experienced eye that it is not a climber's mountain, whereas High Stile, next to it, part of it, is. There must, presumably, be a fault somewhere; in fact, the whole group seems to be faults. Red Pike is syenite, High Stile sound, solid slate, the Haystacks (High Cliffs, Stacken) slate, too, partly sound, partly treacherous, and beyond masses of conglomerate or pudding stone, the reliable and unreliable all mixed up and confused and cropping up unexpectedly, very much as in human characters.

As we emerged on the plateau we found ourselves involved in a tourarente. We had read Professor Tyndall's description of a storm on the fells, and felt its appropriateness keenly. "The wind was furious, and the air all thick with flying snow. . . . The play of the wind, like the chant of a High Mass, was elevating for a time, but, like the latter, it lasted too long." At times we had to incline our bodies considerably from the perpendicular to counteract the atmospheric thrust; while the sudden withdrawal of resistance often caused us to stagger.

The snow storms at the first outfly of the squalls were blinding, the flakes driving horizontally along the crests and vertically up the face of the crags. When the first violence had abated, I had an opportunity of studying more Tyndall. The snow "fell copiously, and as it descended it was drawn into long vertical striæ, which again grouped themselves into distinct columns which brushed with their ends the mountain sides. The effect of friction was well shown. The lower portions of the snow columns were retarded by the earth, while their upper portions moved forward unimpeded; and the consequence was that when the columns were seen at right angles to their line of march, they leaned forward. Storms have been predicted by the barometer hours before they were felt, and these leaning striæ furnish us with a key to the phenomenon. The whirl of a cyclone, for example, which reaches high into the atmosphere, may be active in the air vertically over a place, and this affects the barometer long before the base of the cyclone, which is held back by friction, has reached the same locality."

This is very interesting and instructive, but we had come out to get exercise and see the scenery, not to study meteorology. Exercise we were having in plenty, and the leaning stræ were beautifully in evidence, but the scenery was confined to a few yards, and occasionally limited to a few feet. All at once the weather to the south cleared, and there arose, enframed in an everchanging halo of cloud and mist, the majestic form of an unfamiliar mountain, cleft from base to summit by a mighty cataract of foam. It was some little time before we recognised the mountain as Scafell and the cataract as Deep Ghyll, full of fresh snow.

Beyond High Stile we saw traces of the climbers. Down in Birkness Combe two hardy Norsemen were braving the elements and gazing upwards, whilst under the shadow of a rock others less hardy were intently occupied on something less exalted. A brew of *purée de tomate en tasse*, as I guessed, and it proved I guessed rightly, though I tasted it not that day, much though my soul desired it.

Descending from High Crag into Scarf Gap we found ourselves bathed in soft summer sunlight again, and by the time the steep ascent of the Haystacks had been won, we were hot and thirsty enough to wish we were on the other side of that most complicated summit and down by Black Beck.

The Haystacks are full of climbing, from easy to very difficult, and alas! that it should be so, stands as a mighty memorial to a bright young mountaineer. He was not climbing, he had not been climbing. He was just standing at the edge of the cliff, chatting with his brother and admiring the view, when he suddenly overbalanced, attacked presumably by giddiness, fell and was killed. His brother, who was dragged down in a vain attempt to save him, escaped with severe injuries.

For the benefit of scramblers who come fresh to Buttermere, I may say that the fellside between the Haystacks and Brandreth is covered with outcrops of conglomerate, affording innumerable practice climbs of twenty, thirty, and forty feet, and of all degrees of difficulty. This conglomerate is splendid

stuff to climb on, "rough as a cow's tongue, it would be quite difficult to make a slip on it," besides which the ultragymnast, who delights in approaching as nearly as possible to the impossible, can be safeguarded from above by a rope.

I wonder more tourists do not break the Honister round by walking from the top of the Hause over Fleetwith Pike down to Gatesgarth (the enclosure by the way). The diversion would not take more than an hour and a-half at most, allowing ample time for rest and refreshment at Buttermere before the coaches start for home. The prospect of the south over towards Wasdale fells is very fine, the vista of the chain of lakes, Buttermere, Crummock, and Loweswater, from the summit and during the descent delightful, and the look straight down the face of Honister Crag most impressive. To enjoy this last, one must be perfectly sure of one's head, perfectly sure. Remember the accident on the Haystacks.

Fleetwith Pike is not without its tragedies. Few people who have not experienced it have any idea of the violence of a fellside gale. When the wind is blowing in pistol shots, as the expression is, it does not suffice to incline the body from the perpendicular; the only thing to do is to lie down flat and hold on. "Pistol shots," I may say, does not strike me as a very happy phrase. The sound is a low, hollow moaning, rising to a shriek, and terminating in a shrill, fierce explosion, like the crack of a gigantic whip. One gusty day three quarrymen, a father and two sons, were returning from their work over the top of the Crag. They heard the warning note coming up through the Gap, and immediately threw themselves flat, the father in the middle, with a son on either side. On came the storm demon, picked up the father and whirled him over the precipice, nearly a thousand feet in height, leaving the sons uninjured. The Gap is a few yards to the north of the summit, and is well worth visiting, forming, as it does, a natural rock frame to the picture of the three lakes.

The descent of Fleetwith is very steep and somewhat broken up, though perfectly safe for anyone who knows how to walk and where to put his feet. Among the rocks near the

foot is a pathetic little memorial, a plain white cross with the victim's initials, her age—she was only eighteen—and the text, "In the midst of life we are in death." This poor child was killed through the improper use of her fell-pole, which she held with the point in front of and below her. This is always wrong. I need hardly add that the British tripper, with the delicacy and reverence instinct in his soul, has scribbled his name all over the cross.

Is this habit of scribbling or carving names a token of the zeal to immortalise himself that beats in the breast of man, as Cowper suggests? I think not. I should call it pure caddishness, in this case not many degrees removed from sacrilege.

At Gatesgarth we were nearly overtaken by a magnificent thunderstorm. Fast as we went, it came faster, and when we were about half-a-mile from our hotel we could see the drops dancing on the lake far ahead, though, owing to friction in the constricted pass and against the hill sides, the main mass was still marking a dark line on the white road behind us. Then we ran, with the storm gaining on us at every stride. Nevertheless, we reached the porch unwetted, though less than ten seconds later the roadway was a boiling mist of spray.

The next day saw us on the rocks. We left amidst the comments of the birds of passage, whose general criticism has been almost exactly voiced by Mr. Godley, of Oxford.

Why should a person provided with reason
 Batter his bones and endanger his skin,
 Striving in vain to revert for a season
 Back to the ways of his simian kin?

We found our answer in the lines of the same pleasant poet, when we

Looked from the peak to the limitless distance,
 Mountain and sea, in the rain and the sun,
 Tasted the intimate joy of existence,
 Labour accomplished and victory won.