

REMARKS

(*CHIEFLY AGRICULTURAL*),

Made during a short Excursion into

WESTMORELAND AND CUMBERLAND,

In August 1815.

BY

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(Read Feb. 21st, 1817.)



MUCH need not be said to justify those short excursions which so many of us are in the habit of annually taking, to some favorite watering place or more interesting part of the country.

The invalid has the authority of his physician, the student and man of business may well plead the acknowledged utility of occasional relaxation; and by those in easy or affluent circumstances, these delightful recreations have always been considered among the chief advantages of their condition in life.

Our excursions are usually projected in consequence of some agreeable representations; we anticipate them with pleasure, and whether undertaken from motives of health

or amusement, they seldom fail to afford us much real gratification.

The company we meet with on these occasions is also, not unfrequently, very interesting. Like ourselves, they have been advised to leave their cares and anxieties behind them, and although we meet with some who have unfortunately forgot their lesson, whilst the majority attend to such instructions, the society is sure to be agreeable. The amiable and the accomplished are never seen to greater advantage; and the peevish and morose, witnessing the real value of politeness and civility, are compelled to soften down their manners to a more acceptable standard.

But it is chiefly when we are stationary, that society is of consequence; when travelling from one place to another, we have not always such resources; and as it would be unreasonable to expect, that every part of the country through which we pass should be very interesting, we must often depend upon ourselves to make the journey pleasant.

On many occasions a person fond of agricultural pursuits has a decided advantage in travelling. At every step he finds something to imitate or avoid, and his attention is kept alive by the continual exercise of his judgment on the variety of management

which he sees. The value of his remarks will, however, be very differently estimated; such as are fond of rural life, may perhaps excuse the following observations.

From Bolton to Blackburn we noticed the frequent failure of attempts to grow corn and potatoes in situations and upon soils very unfit for them. Little attention seemed to be paid to the seed potatoes, as it was not uncommon to observe three or four varieties of blossom in one row: and in some corn fields the weeds were almost equal in bulk to the straw. There are few good houses to be seen from the road, and the cottages appeared filthy and uncomfortable. The farms are small, the fences bad, and the timber mostly sickly and ill grown.

We saw only one specimen of drill husbandry, which was in a field of turnips, and not very promising. The clover was very poor, but the meadows and pastures looked much better than the plowed land, and are improvable at half the expence of growing corn. Draining seemed well attended to, materials being found in almost every farm, but weeding was much neglected in a great proportion of the arable lands and gardens near the road.

In consequence of the late high price of corn, much grass land had been converted into tillage ; and it is very unfortunate for this neighbourhood, that the land is, in general, of such a nature that it is not easy to return it to grass again. Very stiff as well as very light soils are liable to lose their young grass roots during winter, and hence there is great difficulty in replacing them. Few sheep are here to be seen, and the stock of cattle seemed a mixture of all sorts. The roads were rough but firm. Having the advantage of canal conveyance, and a considerable population, it is in every respect better fitted for a manufacturing than a farming district.

From Blackburn to Preston the ride is more interesting to the farmer, though little is to be learnt. The farm houses and cottages appear more comfortable, and the crops of corn and potatoes seemed to improve in proportion to the higher quality of the land. Some good houses are to be seen from the road, with a fair proportion of well grown timber. We noticed another specimen of drill husbandry, but like the former, six weeks, at least, too late in sowing the turnips.

We passed some very good upland meadows, and observed a few of the real Lan-

cashire long horned cows. This fine breed of cattle has been much overlooked by modern agriculturalists. They are generally good milkers; and from their large size, such of them as do not milk freely, are very well calculated for profitable feeding.

The roads are here repaired by breaking large stones which are collected from the bed of a river in the neighbourhood. This practice answers tolerably well for light weights, but was found of very little use on the roads near Manchester. We were informed that most of the smaller farmers have looms in their houses, upon which their families are chiefly employed during the winter months.

At Horton Tower, about four miles from Preston, we had a fine view of the estuary of the Ribble, and an amazing extent of the richest low land in the county.

Near Walton we saw a field of potatoes, about a Lancashire acre, in which the sets had all been planted whole. This method has been often recommended, but I had never before seen it followed to any thing like this extent. My experiments have convinced me, that, although a greater weight may occasionally be obtained in this way, nothing near the usual quantity of marketable produce is ever yielded.

By the common practice of cutting the potatoes, we generally get four or five good sized ones from every root, and about the same number of small ones; but when they are set whole, the proportion of the small ones to the larger has with me, never been less than four to one, and sometimes much more. This overbalances the advantage in point of weight, to say nothing of the increased labour, the plow being of little use when potatoes are planted whole.

From Preston to Lancaster very little is still to be learned by the experienced farmer: there is however an appearance of greater attention to a more uniform course of crops. The wheat being chiefly summer worked, is cleaner, and as the second crops of clover are generally eaten off, the land is left in good condition. Some large houses are seen in the distances, and a few of them are well sheltered by extensive plantations. Many of the cottages and some of the farm houses, have mud walls, but they are kept cleaner and neater, on the outsides at least, than those on the road we had passed.

The fences, particularly after leaving Gars-tang, have a great proportion of hazel in them, which independently of its being naturally tender, is often broken by children

seeking for nuts, and the consequence is, that in many places you see nearly as much naked cop as fence.

Wheat during this ride was far riper than oats, and led us to suppose the oats must be sown too late, or the seed not properly attended to.

It is the practice with many farmers in the north of England to procure their seed corn from the more southern counties, apprehending that it is there grown in higher perfection. This is however in direct opposition to what has often been stated, viz. that the seeds of the colder climates ripen sooner.

We are informed that in Lapland, barley ripens in 60 days; whereas in the south of France it requires 130 to 140 days. It is also stated that the same holds good in a great degree with respect to the seeds brought from these countries.

The potatoe culture during this part of our journey was at a low ebb. No attention was paid to good seed. Runners were as common as the true potatoes.

At Lancaster we had an opportunity of seeing the salmon fishery; and we found that a single fish could not be bought cheaper there than in Manchester. Salmon of one, two, and three years growth, as well as the older

ones which go up the rivers to spawn, leave the sea for fresh water at this season of the year, and afford excellent sport to the angler in this neighbourhood. We were well informed that when the young brood go down to the sea, they are always preceded by some of the parent fish, whilst others follow close in their rear, to protect them on their journey.

From Lancaster to Burton the road was very good, being well repaired by breaking the stones collected from the adjoining fallows. Not many good farm houses were to be seen, and very few cottages. The fences are chiefly white thorn of very vigorous growth, and little interrupted by hedgerow timber of any kind.

The grass land near Lancaster, as is the case near most large towns, was highly improved, and the corn and potatoes looked very well. Summer fallowed wheat, oats, and clover, or turnips, barley, and clover, are the usual rotation of crops; but we noticed a greater proportion of barley than of any other kind of grain. A few of the turnips were drilled, but the corn was invariably sown broad-cast. The wheat was of the old red lammas kind, and it is perhaps worth while here to remark the decided advantage it had the last season, over all the new and

more fashionable varieties. As the lammas or red wheat ripens, it begins to hang its head, and the rain falls very readily from it: whereas the white and bearded wheats generally support their heads perpendicularly during the whole of their growth, and being downy and disposed to retain moisture, are, of course, more liable to sprit in this position than when the head is more pendant from the stalk. We were particularly struck with the bright yellow colour of the wheat straw, which seemed to resemble in quality that which is grown upon the chalk lands of Bedfordshire. We could not however learn, that it had been at all applied to the same beautiful manufacture. Near Dunstable it is a source of the greatest profit to the farmer, as it is not unusual for a crop of wheat straw to sell for much more than the grain.

Adjoining the Burton road, so great a proportion of the land is in tillage, that we did not expect to see much live stock. The plows were drawn by two horses abreast, led by a single one, and of course requiring a driver.

After leaving Burton, we had a rich view of an extensive tract of corn land, apparently under very productive management.

Although the country from Lancaster to

Burton is by no means hilly, it is finely varied by a succession of gentle swells. Almost every field partakes more or less of some of them, but they do not appear to hinder the cultivation in any respect. The surface of a great part of the noted Filde land is similarly marked. In the celebrated vale of Evesham, it is the constant aim of the farmer to imitate these natural undulations, on his low grounds, by plowing his broad lands invariably in one direction, and thereby gradually drawing the soil higher into the centre of them.

From Burton to Kendal the road passes through a well cultivated country not remarkable for any peculiarity of management. We met no other but single horse carts: one driver has generally the care of two or three of them, and the horses are so accustomed to follow each other in line, that when the direction of the leading one is changed, a carriage has no difficulty in passing the rest. With a view to the protection of the roads, an attempt was made a few years ago, to introduce these carts generally, without success. Those we met were mostly laden with lime, which appeared the chief article used in dressing the summer fallows. The clover was very good, and generally fed off by well sized sheep. Gate posts, an expensive article

in many places, were here supplied by two stone pillars of similar dimensions. The approach to Kendal is very pleasing; but we could not help regretting there should still remain any stone walls as fences in so rich a valley.

From Kendal on the high road to Penrith, for several miles there was some spirited farming, and we saw good crops of barley on very high ground; but these hills appeared naturally fertile, and lime is readily procured in the neighbourhood.

Turning round, about three miles from Kendal, we had a most pleasing view of the country we had just passed. The remainder of our ride to Shap is interesting only to the sportsman.

From Shap to Lowther Castle we had an opportunity of witnessing the decided superiority of the drill system, in the cleanness and excellence of the turnip and corn crops. Indeed we had seldom seen better corn; but owing to its uncommon luxuriance, it was much beaten down by the rains, which had recently fallen.

Lowther Castle has been recently rebuilt in the old stile, and when a little more softened by time, will be quite in character with the immense forest which surrounds it.

In the neighbourhood of Penrith the farmers seemed to have availed themselves of the instructions of their famous agriculturalist, Mr. Curwen. Near the residence of such a character, one naturally expects some proof of the influence of good example, and we were not disappointed. Some excellent crops of the bullock turnip, were shewn to us. It was here preferred to the Norfolk and the Globe, the latter of which it resembles in its conical roof. It has an advantage over the Norfolk, in its confined crown, and being less disposed to lodge snow or rain within it, which occasions much injury to this useful root.

The land in the neighbourhood of Penrith, is varied in its management; some of the farmers pertinaciously adhering to the old system, and others with spirit adopting the new. We should have supposed this contrast could not have remained more than a few years, had we not been aware of the difficulty of introducing the most obvious improvements among farmers.

From the extent of sheep walk attached to most of the farms in Cumberland and Westmoreland, a greater proportion of the low lands is in tillage, than would otherwise be allowed. There is seldom seen in any county,

more arable land at one view, than we often meet with on the banks of the Eden.

Our first introduction to the lakes was at Pooley Bridge, the lower end of Ulswater. The Emont, which runs from the lake under this bridge, was literally alive with trout, and our impatience to begin our sport made us curtail some very beautiful walks near this station.

There are some very healthy plantations on the borders of Ulswater, consisting of varieties of the fir, with larch, oak, beech, chestnut, poplar and plane-tree; and on the lower grounds, as might be expected, the willow is preferred. Perhaps there is no tree to which our best sylvan scenery is more indebted than to the beech. In the sheltered situations, which the country round the lakes so often furnishes, its fine hanging branches acquire a luxuriance, and at the same time a delicacy of foliage, which is not surpassed by any other tree.

The farming near Ulswater was not equal to what we had just seen; but the farm houses were in good order, and the cottages very neat and comfortable in their appearance.

From the battlements of the bridge we had an opportunity of watching the trout feed, without disturbing them; but the water was

so very clear, that whenever we attempted to throw a line upon it, they retreated in a moment. As the brightness of the day declined we began to have charming diversion; we had however great reason to regret, that none of our fishing books contained a proper classification of the flies, which trout feed upon at different seasons of the year. The provincial names of our best authorities were of no use to us; and we soon found that old father Walton scarcely notices one of the flies which procured our sport. Having caught some live ones, they proved to be varieties of ephemeræ, and were easily imitated; but as the night approached, we had more difficulty to copy some of the phalænæ, as we could not so easily make out their colours. The large trout were taking these moths very boldly, before darkness put an end to our diversion.

There being no pike in Ulswater, it abounds with trout; and it is impossible to conceive better quarters for the angler than this place affords.

The Emont, as it runs through the vale of that name, is every thing which Walton himself would have wished for. In May there is excellent sport upon the lake, and in the

streams, with the various ephemerae and phryganeae, and in June their famous coleopterous fly, the bracken clock, draws together a joyous fraternity of anglers.

The larvæ of flies are so numerous in some rivers, and so easily obtained by the trout, that whenever they begin to feed upon them, there is a suspension of sport with the fly, which continues till the insect bursts its prison and escapes from the water. The angler who is not aware of this circumstance, is often at a loss to account for his blank days, when the weather appears favourable, and the water is acknowledged to be in fine order for fishing. Water-bred flies seem to be most relished by trout; but unfortunately, this branch of entomology, so interesting to the disciple of Walton, has hitherto been but little attended to, and is yet very imperfectly understood.

From Ulswater to Keswick it rained almost incessantly, so that we had seldom an opportunity of seeing either the country or its management. Some tourists however, make up these disappointments very easily. A celebrated agriculturist having dined at ——— left that house on his road to ——— after dark. As this was an interesting part

of ——— and it would be expected that he should say something of it in his journal, he gets over the difficulty in the following brief remark—" From ——— to ——— I saw no sheep."

The road to Keswick is very hilly, but firm. The sun broke through the clouds, just as we passed the rich vale of St. John, and we had an opportunity of contrasting the highly cultivated landscape on our left, with the bold, and varied ruggedness of the mountains on our right. The crops of corn looked very well, but the wet weather having set in during their hay harvest, had rendered most of it unfit for use. We were very sorry to find the cottages and their little gardens near the road so very slovenly; as we could not help wishing for the appearance of comfort and happiness amidst such delightful scenery.

Lime being an expensive article, we observed few turnips and little clover.

The mountains were studded over with sheep; many were browsing upon rocks and precipices, which seemed quite inaccessible to man. Most of these sheep were of the true mountain breed, and very small. The half bred Leicester have been found to stand the winter very well in Derbyshire, but they

would not be active enough for the craggy walks of Cumberland.

The rain having entirely ceased, we saw the late Bishop of Landaff's extensive plantations to great advantage. Such as were tolerably well sheltered, seemed to be in a very thriving state. It was easy to perceive that the larch was the favourite tree with this celebrated planter, as it equalled in quantity almost all the rest. Where new enclosures are anticipated, this is certainly a most useful plant, the thinnings being so admirably calculated for railing, but on other accounts it seems to be daily losing ground in the estimation of the public. Like the black Italian poplar, its uncommonly vigorous growth for the first ten or twelve years, has not in many instances been followed up by a proportionate improvement afterwards; and although both these fashionable plants far outstrip our more sturdy forest trees in their early thriving, and bring a quicker profit to the owner; such as plant for their children as well as themselves begin to find that the oak, the ash and the common poplar, ultimately pay them better.

I apprehend there are few large plantations on low ground, in which the oak, judiciously placed, has not in thirty years overtaken the larch. I made an average a few years ago,

where it was decidedly in favour of the oak, and an eminent northern planter informed me that on a most careful examination of some of the largest enclosures in Scotland, he had frequently found a similar result. Where the bulk is equal, the comparative value is obvious.

The approach to the Derwent from Keswick is very beautiful. Our introduction to this lake was particularly fortunate. A mild summer's evening had succeeded a very rainy day. The sky was without a cloud, and the atmosphere free from mist. The remoter hills had assumed a variety of soft purple tinges which formed a fine distance to the dusky foreground of those mountains which immediately overhang and protect the beautiful scenery of the Derwent. The lake itself was smooth as glass, and the softened reflections of the surrounding landscape upon its surface, were almost as pleasing as their rich originals. The birds which inhabit the fine hanging woods on the borders of the lake, were challenging their rivals upon the islands, and the distant responses of the latter, often resembling an echo, had a most bewitching effect upon the ear.

These islands are covered with the finest specimens of our ornamental trees. Even

the ash and the alder, which in common growth are not often remarked for their beauty, here acquire a delicacy of foliage that entitles them to a companionship with the beech, the larch, the willow and the acacia.

The fine slopes of sheep walk rising from the lake, are completely sheltered by plantations of most luxuriant growth, and above these, an astonishing succession of lofty mountains are changing their mighty profiles and fantastic features at every step you take. In their nearer approaches to each other, they form dark and dismal glens: receding, they open into the most enchanting valleys, the sides of which are often fringed with coppice, and almost all of them are enlivened by some brilliant little trout stream, returning its crystal water to the larger rivers on the lakes below.

That beautiful ephemera the May fly, or as it is called in Derbyshire the drake, makes its appearance on these rivers from the 1st to the 12th of June. Finding its wings then at liberty, it rises from the bottom of the water with the husk of the pupa still attached to the lower part of the body; but on reaching the surface it disentangles itself entirely, and flies, with much difficulty, to the first tree or

hedge it can meet with, and immediately creeps under the leaves. Here it remains without food for two or three days, when another very wonderful change takes place. The whole of its outer green coloured skin is then stripped off, and the fly emerges in a much more active and delicate form. If the day be fine, it immediately sallies forth in search of its mate, and they are seen dancing together in the air, and mostly over the rivers or lakes, in immense quantities. The ova of the female being protruded, are jerked from them, in their up and down flights, and their specific gravity being much greater than water, they sink quickly to the bottom, where they are hatched by the warmth of the succeeding months, and the larvæ seek their winter quarters in the sand beds, and stiller parts of rivers. The parent fly not appearing to have taken any food, becomes perfectly transparent and dies. This I apprehend is also the history of the lesser ephemeræ, known to anglers by the name of duns.

Most of the valleys in Cumberland afford excellent pasturage for sheep, and are chiefly appropriated to such as are immediately intended for market. In these natural meadows, many of the best esteemed grasses are to be

found, and excepting where the land has been over tilled, the acrid and sourer ones are seldom seen.

Our second day at Keswick was spent upon the lake, from which we had a perpetual succession of the most enchanting views. We had also excellent sport with pike, the wind being easterly. Our books on angling tell us that pike seldom feed on perch, and advise us to keep at home, when the wind is easterly. Here a live perch is the usual bait, and an east wind the most desirable.

We were much surprised to see the promising crops of oats and barley which were growing upon Latrig, according to Mr. Otley, 880 feet above Keswick and 1100 higher than the sea. As this is about one third of the height of Skiddaw, it would be fair to conclude that it is higher than any of those situations in Lancashire, where we had seen the growth of corn so unsuccessfully attempted. We could not however help thinking, notwithstanding these more fortunate experiments, that it is wiser to plant the better aspects of high hills, and in the end more profitable. Manure is in every instance carried up at a great expence, and very liable, with the crop, to be washed away by the storms

of the county which so often prevail in mountainous districts.

A short distance from Keswick, on the Cockermouth road, we had a charming view of the rich vale of Newlands and Bassenthwaite water. Here again we saw the whole of the corn grown on Latrig, surrounded on every side by heath. It was impossible not to admire the spirit of the gentleman who had undertaken these improvements, whilst we very much doubted his remuneration. Considerable allotments of Whinlatter, nearly upon the same elevation, were also covered with excellent oats.

Taking the higher road, along the side of Swinton, we had a commanding prospect of the vale of Lorton, and looking towards Cockermouth, over Solway frith, distinctly perceived the foremost of the hills in Scotland.

A great part of our road was through sheep walk of very unequal quality. Down in the vale there appeared much more corn land than pasturage; wheat was generally followed by barley or oats sown with clover and other artificial grass seeds. Some of the hill sides had been much injured by paring and burning, the temptation to which no doubt had arisen

from a desire in the farmers to avail themselves of the ashes of the fern, which grows here most luxuriantly.

Having refreshed ourselves at Scale-hill, we ascended a station near the house, which enabled us to overlook the whole of Crummock-water, and part of Lowes-water. The barren mountains, which surround the former, rise immediately from the borders of the lake, and with the exception of a few patches on the warmer sides, have no vegetation whatever upon them. This lake is considered much deeper than the Derwent or Bassenthwaite, and produces the finest char. Unlike most others, these delicious fish forsake the shallows during the warmer months, and retreat to the deepest water out of the reach of nets, and are seldom tempted by baits of any kind. In the month of October, they begin to return to the creeks on the east side of the lake, and become a considerable source of profit to the proprietors.

On our return to Keswick, we visited the extensive nursery gardens, and were much surprised to find, that the evergreens had sustained little injury during the uncommonly severe winters of 1813—14. Apples and pears were in great abundance, but the plum trees did not appear equally healthy or pro-

lific. Many of the cottagers keep bees, which, from the abundance of heath blossom on the neighbouring hills, afford the choicest honey. Stall or pen feeding is not here much practised: the sheep are brought up by browsing upon the young heath of the mountains, and are fed off chiefly by the sweet herbage of their sheltered pasturage; hence the decided superiority of the Cumberland mutton. Having understood that the fine flavour of their bacon arose from its being chiefly fed on peas, we were surprized to see so few grown in the country. On enquiry, we found that barley and oats were as much used here in feeding as elsewhere, we had therefore reason to believe that this acknowledged excellence arises chiefly from the pigs being much less confined. From their birth they are suffered to go at large in the woods, and if the season be favourable, they make themselves half fat with acorns.

The clipped or plashed hedge-row is not often seen near the lakes, and the trees which grow in the fences are seldom pruned. This neglect certainly softens the landscape to the eye of the painter, but cannot be justified to the prudent farmer.

The road from Keswick to Ambleside, affords a continual variety of the most inter-

esting scenery. Grasmere, by many esteemed the most beautiful of the lakes, forms a very important part of it, but as I have already trespassed upon the time of the Society, I will not, at present, trouble you with the remainder of the remarks which were made to preserve the recollection of this delightful excursion.

I cannot however conclude without observing, that, during our ramble among the lakes, we had frequent occasion to apply to the lower orders of the inhabitants as guides and assistants in our sports ; and that we were invariably pleased with their attention and civility, and especially with their very reasonable expectations. Considering their encreased intercourse with strangers, their habits appeared much less contaminated than one might have expected ; and if they do not in their manners exactly come up to that pastoral simplicity and purity, which one would fain attach to such a country, they are certainly very free from the vices, and any thing like the rudeness and incivility, of some of our manufacturing districts.



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