

[THE WESTMORLAND LAKER]

The manuscript is in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, as fMS Eng 974 (11). It consists of a single unwatermarked sheet folded once to give two leaves 204 by 253 mm; the writing, in black ink, fills all four pages. A circular tear, about 40 mm in diameter, in the upper centre of the open sheet has removed between one and three words from about six lines on each page.

This is a fragment of an article intended for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Given that the 'letter' enclosed in the narrative, and dated 3 December 1820, was supposedly written 'about six weeks ago', the writing of the whole piece presumably dates from early January, 1821. On the other hand De Quincey may be putting an epistolary article he did write in December 1820 – for the January issue of *Blackwood's* – into a much larger frame (or even fabricating the dates for arbitrary reasons).

Whatever the case, the bad-tempered set of letters that passed between De Quincey and the magazine's proprietor William Blackwood in late December 1820/early January 1821 discusses what can only really be this article, whether in concept or execution (see Symonds pp. 43–5 for details and context). Losing all patience with a writer who seemed deliberately to be baiting him, Blackwood refers to the article in a letter dated 8 January 1821, noting to De Quincey, 'if you cannot send me anything better than "The English Lakes" it will be quite unnecessary for you to give yourself any farther trouble about the Magazine' (NLS, MS 30304, f. 204).

Since the truncated fragment alone runs to p. 22, the complete article, which might have stood as De Quincey's first original contribution to *Blackwood's*, was a lengthy one. In 1822 John Wilson would ask William Blackwood to send it to him as he prepared to review William Green's *Tourist's New Guide to the Lakes* (1819) (NLS, MS 4009, ff. 277–8). The ensuing article, 'Green's Guide to the Lakes' appeared in *Blackwood's* in July, 1822 (vol. XII, pp. 84–91) but does not seem to contain any De Quincey input. It is likely that De Quincey's article was itself a failed review of Green's popular book, especially in view of Wilson's comment in his 1822 letter to Blackwood that De Quincey had 'carried off the magazine's copy of Green.

For other possible refugees from this article see the next item (pp. 255–9 below) and Vol. 3, pp. 162–3, 'To the Lakers'. In 1832, two years after turning down what seems to have been a commission from J. G. Lockhart for a work on the Lakes (Symonds, pp. 370–1), De Quincey would offer William Blackwood (of all people) 'a miscellaneous art. on the *Lakes of England*' (Symonds, p. 423). Though he was never really to tap the long-lived vogue for topographical works on the Lakes, this satire on Lakes tourism is symptomatic of a wider reaction against the omnipresent, and equally long-lived, 'picturesque' Lakes tourist.

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As to what {↑ John} Paul ‹Rich›¹ observes {↑ as a ‹remarkable› noticeable phenomenon} of the continental *Laker**² “that, whereas among ‹the› mice, herrings and birds the females accompany them; on the contrary only the North men (he ‹has been› {↑ is} speaking of {↑ the} Germans and English) and none of the North women are driven by ‹any› instinct to Paris, just as male parrots and popinjays but no female ones are imported into Europe” – in this peculiarity I must admit that the Westmorland Laker does not share, as indeed will appear from the sketches ‹of wa th its ha habits which› of the Westmorland humors which we {↑ are} ‹shall› ourselves {↑ going to} bring {tear} the public; but ‹we understand that› in this point the continental laker {↑ itself} is so much altered that it {↑ ‹is› is} no longer the {tear} that it was: and even the silver scales, which John Paul speaks of, ‹untarnished from› {↑ according to} the general complaints {tear}xx xxx seem to have been tarnished and bedimmed, ‹by the dramatic {↑ bad habits} extravagance (as some say) ‹by› by {tear}ates and the National Debt³ ‹(as› {↑ says} the fish itself xxxxx)› ‹Memoir› Memoir &c. p. 78–80.

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{tear} * this word Laker is suited, by a kind of preestablished harmony, to the class of lake-visitors whom it designates in Westmorland and Cumberland. For long before such a class existed, it was the word in general use (from the ‹old› original Gothic *laikan* ‹det› *ludere*)⁴ to denote a child at play – or one engaged in childish sport. The yeomanry of Westmorland therefore apply it in its secondary sense with a half-conscious air of sarcasm.

Leaving the author of the Memoir, and his ichthyological researches, we come now to a correspondent of our own, some parts of whose letters take up the subject at the point where ‹it› John Paul and the Memoir have just left it – and exhibit ‹some› several ‹of› classes of the Laker (not in his ichthyological but his human character) very facetiously and we dare say ‹was› very graphically; for we must premise that our correspondent, who is an old and dear friend of our own, has long been a resident ‹in the› amongst the lakes; and, though his studies are generally and where he is allowed to pick and choose for himself of the profounder sort ‹order›, yet so abstruse are the humors – whims – or whatever you choose to call them of the Laker (their “little ‹enom› enormities” as our friend himself calls them ‹par› ‹borrow› by a choice phrase culled from the Pulpit eloquence of Westmorland) – so obtrusive and staring are they that even his transcendental mind ‹could not but› (for he also lectures on the Predicaments)⁵ could not refuse to ‹bend› stoop itself to the task of decorating them ‹in› with his classical prose. *Prose* we say, ‹in a good xxxxxx› {↑ and} *absit invidia verbo!*⁶ ‹It remains that some have notwithstanding› {↑ We say it in a good sense, though we say} it ‹be said› of a transcendentalist: it remains that some other correspondent should favor us with a metrical

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⟨account⟩ {↑ version} of the same class of ⟨animals⟩ humors as displayed in the same region: and we shall then have a portable ⟨voll⟩ volume of Elegant Extracts from the Lakes in Prose and Verse. We may as well introduce our friend's ⟨extract⟩ sketches by ⟨his the⟩ {↑ a} letter which he wrote to us about six weeks ago;⁷ both because that letter itself contains a sketch of the present condition of Westmorland which is really quite {↑ pathetic} ⟨affecting⟩, and because that very letter it was which first moved us to take up this whole subject. ⟨Our friend as will be seen in is In some parts of his letter⟩ {↑ On some points} our friend, as will be seen, is rather satirical – especially upon waterfalls and echoes: but this is quite foreign to his nature; and therefore we conclude that he wrote those passages before dinner; for at that time he is very ferocious: a fact which we first ascertained on his own confession when we remonstrated with him some time back on the ⟨way in⟩ inhuman severity with which he mangled all those unfortunate authors whose works were intrusted to him for reviewal. ⟨The⟩ All, {↑ it seemed}, had been reviewed before dinner. ⟨Th⟩ The remedy seemed easy; and ⟨the⟩ at our request all were reviewed after din-

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ner: but in this second stage of the case matters went on worse than before: ⟨we had ourselves se⟩ the reviews were {↑ now} so bland and milky that we were ⟨obliged⟩ ourselves obliged to season them ⟨and s⟩ with those little asperities and those ⟨animal⟩ superficial touches from ⟨those⟩ our critical rowels ⟨which⟩ {↑ the public insist on having and which} do but endear the rider to his horse and the critic to his man. This was troublesome: we could not undertake to be at every man's service ⟨in⟩ as ⟨his⟩ a pocket caustic: ⟨or bottle of⟩ ⟨as his⟩ so we hinted ⟨th⟩ to him that all who wrote for us must furnish their own cayenne – ev{tear} his own 'hornet' (as Mr. Coleridge rather *waspishly* calls some of us rough riders in the service):⁸ {tear} understood; and thereupon he adopted a most ingenious plan, ⟨on which he has ever since proceeded⟩ {tear} which it is that we tell the story, because ⟨he has since⟩ on this plan he has since conducted his critical {tear} ⟨all cases which have fallen under his care not all to our satisfaction⟩ ⟨these to⟩ so as equally to satisfy {↑ ourselves} ⟨us⟩ {tear} conscience {↑ and his antagonist propensities}. His plan was this: knowing {↑ that it was equally} ⟨his⟩ impossible ⟨it was⟩ to struggle with his {↑ 'tendencies'} ⟨propensities⟩ before or after dinner, he determined on ⟨inflicting ⟨the⟩ upon⟩ {↑ assembling} all ⟨authors⟩ books sent to him {↑ by tens, and by twenties} ⟨for reviewing⟩ on his table, and there inflicting upon them by lot the Roman punishment of decimation (that is, for the information of our ⟨non-classic⟩ unlearned readers, putting every tenth man to death for the offences of the whole and absolving the other nine): the

unhappy author on whom the lot fell was called up before dinner and suffered capitally; the fortunate nine were dismissed to immortality and happiness between dinner and tea-time. And thus we obtained that mixture of sugar and vinegar which is suited to the public <app> palate <and tha> and in that proportion which is agreeable to the known gentleness of our own nature. This anecdote we have related thus circumstantially because it <gives a> shadows out *συνέτοισι*⁹ the history of modern critical practice, the greater part of it being (as we firmly believe) conducted under influences such as those which {↑ governed} our Westmorland friend <acknowledged> in his first and second stage, though not perhaps on those deliberate principles which he adopted in his <last> third. But we {↑ are digressing} <have talked too long>; and are {↑ besides} <keeping> detaining our readers from the amusing letter of our correspondent. Let *him* now <{↑ take up the subject}> speak for himself and hearken all ye men of Ambleside <(as the Parliamentary gentlemen have it)> ‘take possession’ of the public.

Fox-Ghyll (or, as the unlearned spell it, *Gill*), {↑ near Ambleside}¹⁰
December 3, 1820.

‘My dear Christopher,¹¹

I have thought over all that you have said about ——, and all that you mean to say; and therefore you need not give yourself the trouble of saying anything more about it. <It> With most of it you have my hearty <as> concurrences; and with respect to those points on which <I have vent> you will find that I have ventured to dissent from you, if I do not here give you my reasons at full length – it is partly <f> because I am weary of the subject and partly because I wish to draw your attention to another which at this moment interests me much more. You remember this country? Indeed how should *you* fail to remember it, who forget nothing — not even your old tattered copy of Lord Berners’s Froissart¹² (which, by the way, I wish you would forget, as else you will give me the trouble of begging for it in M.’s name who must and shall have it).

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Well: this country then, which you remember so well, remembering you cannot but love. Your gout¹³ indeed, when you were amongst us, did not allow you to avail yourself of all the leisure which your professional business <allowed> {↑ left} you. A most accommodating gout it would have been, if it had: for in those <days> times your leisure was, I think, equal to about 24 hours a day; and the only business you had of a troublesome nature, <was if> {↑ that} I recollect, {↑ was} digestion and that correspondence which you carried on for some <oth> reason or other with your old {↑ *tear*} maiden aunt.

Charmingly witty that correspondence must have been. I remember, Christopher, you {*tear*} shy of reading us any extracts from those letters – though abundantly communicative of all {*tear*}. – But I am rambling. To return, then, this country – this lovely country of the lakes which {*tear*} I love so much and so justly – it will shock you to hear is in a rapid state of decline: and, if something is not speedily done for it, the next news you will hear is that it is all dead and gone. Take my word for it the whole country between Kendal and Whitehaven¹⁴ will vanish like any parenthesis which I have struck out in the ———; and some morning Kendal, when she gets up to her breakfast, will find herself united to an ill-looking town that she has supposed to be upwards of fifty miles off. {↑ The symptoms are alarming enough, as you would think, if you <saw all that I saw> knew all that I know:} <It's a fact, I assure you, and you would be of the same way of thinking, if you knew all that I know> but you shall hear. – It is now some years since the country began to look sickly. The first <year> {↑ summer} that she ailed anything to sickness was {↑ that of} 1814. In that year you know the Peace¹⁵ came like a clap of thunder: and forthwith John Bull ran over to Paris¹⁶ like a vulture allured by carrion, or like a fine gentleman running away from it. This country, finding herself neglected, naturally fretted: she had been used to a good deal of company, and had been much flattered and admired; so that she could not be expected to bear the change very well. Early in the spring of 1815 Bonaparte broke prison;¹⁷ <and> the war was renewed; and our patient, together with the newspapers and the corn-market, began to look up. But then came the battle of Waterloo:¹⁸ and she never looked up again. Waterloo drew over so many people from <London> England¹⁹ that in London I understand there were hardly tailors enough left to make the national breeches: in fact there would not have been enough, but that orders for breeches fell off proportionally. In flourishing parts of Mary-le-bone,²⁰ where heretofore there had been 81 tailors <that is, 9 good merry> there was scarcely left the square root of that number: which, Christopher, in any other case might seem to {↑ imply} <mean> that there were 9 {↑ men} left: but, if you think it means *that* number here, it shews you know very little of Algebra as applied to the consideration of tailors: in fact it means not 9 but 9999/9999 ad infinitum. In short France drew over far more than 8 parts in 9 of the Britannic tailors. The tailors being gone, it <followed> {↑ w}as a matter of course that the leather-breeches makers should follow. The Curriers²¹ and the Tanners

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insisted on knowing whither the leather-breeches makers were going – and what for – and what was the meaning of their absurd conduct: but, as they could not have an answer to these questions without going for it, the curriers

and tanners set off in a body. The shoemakers saw no reason why they should stick to the last, when nobody else did: so they packed up their *awls* and followed. In short from less to more all the trades and mysteries, arts, sciences and occupa{*tear*} mounted on horseback or on the roofs of coaches &c. on their road to Dover or Harwich {*tear*} fact nobody stayed except a few old dustmen, whose personal appearance seemed {*tear*} their making their way in the fashionable circles at Paris, some scores of persons in {*tear*} and elsewhere who at the particular request of government staid to be hung, and <two> {*tear*} or three members of the <Executiv> *executive* department who staid (I suppose on patriotic principles) to hang them. — In this state of things it could hardly be expected that Westmorland should recover her health and spirits: she did not; but <grew annually worse> went annually down hill and is now nearly at the bottom. To judge of this you must have seen the country as long {↑ and as lately} as I have. In fact the symptoms <are> stare you every <in> where in the face: the Lakes themselves seem to me as if they were on half-pay; the waterfalls are manifestly on a sort of peace-establishment; and the very echoes, I protest to you, are superannuated; and indeed by next year I question whether there will be any echoes at all. As a proof of this, let me mention to you that the other day, when I was at Patterdale, I bought three ten-penny echoes;*²² and I told the waiter to let them all off at once; and I give you my word of honor that all three together were not equal to one eighteen-penny one that I bought before the battle of Waterloo; notwithstanding I gave them all the assistance in my power by drawing the <butt> cork of a bottle of soda-water at the same moment. When the echoes decay and grow so consumptive, I need scarcely tell you what happens to the men. In reality our country is the very reverse of those <dales> which our great friend at Rydal-Mount²³ speaks of — where

———— ‘Earth with all her pleasant fruits and flowers
‘Fades and participates in man’s decline.’²⁴

Here on the contrary man is but an appendage to the scenery; {↑ the} door-keeper<s> to echoes, or {↑ the} porter<s> at <the> waterfalls; and he naturally flourishes or decays as they do. Therefore, where the echoes are become so degenerate as that three 10^d. {↑ ones} are equal only (and speaking scarcely equal to

* <‘*Tenpenny echoes*’>: — “in the romantic scenery of the northern lakes,” says an ingenious writer (Melincourt, vol. 2, p. 167)²⁵ <the> “every wonder of nature is made an article of trade; the cataracts are locked up, and the echoes are sold.”