

ART. XX.—*A Lakeland journey, 1759.* By B. G. HUTTON, B.A., Dip. Arch. Admin.

*Read at Keswick, July 7th, 1961.*

IN 1759 John Crofts of Bristol, having completed a journey via Derby, Carlisle and Glasgow to Edinburgh, wrote a long and interesting letter describing his travels. The recipient of the letter appears to have been Ralph Radcliffe, a youthful member of the family settled at Hitchin Priory, Herts., and the letter is now in the Delmé-Radcliffe Collection in Hertford County Record Office, with the reference Hertford County Records/DE4320. It is published here by permission of the depositor of the Collection, Mr Ralph Delmé-Radcliffe of Hitchin Priory.

The portion of the letter which is here printed deals with the journey from Preston to the Scottish Border. It is dated 11 June 1759 from Bristol.

From his interest in harbour facilities, cargoes and local industry I supposed that Crofts was a merchant; there was a John Crofts, merchant, in Bristol in 1775, although this seems rather late. Closer in date was John Crofts, bookseller and stationer, who appears in the Bristol Burgess Rolls for 1751 and who is a country voter living in London in 1754. This is probably the John Crofts, bookseller, who in 1750 was carrying on business in The Tolzey, Bristol. In the following year he won a £10,000 lottery prize.<sup>1</sup> Possibly this stroke of luck enabled a bookseller and stationer to undertake such a journey, but the identity of the traveller is not yet established beyond all doubt.

Rather more can be said about the person to whom

<sup>1</sup> Plomer, Bushnell and Dix: *Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers, . . . 1726-1775* (1932).

the letter was written, though again there is still an element of doubt. My suggestion is, as mentioned above, that the recipient was young Ralph Radcliffe. The letter was found with others received by Ralph from friends and relatives, and was obviously intended to guide him on a proposed journey to Scotland. In fact Ralph ignored Crofts' painstaking advice and commentary upon the N.W. route, and travelled through Yorkshire. He was admitted a freeman of the Borough of Stirling and a guild brother of the City of Glasgow, while in Scotland; immediately upon his return to Hertfordshire he joined the local militia, and within a few months he was posted to the West Country where he died at a very early age.

In the extract from John Crofts' letter which follows, his spelling and punctuation have been retained but I have modified his rather indiscriminate use of upper and lower case letters.

*A Journey to the North, 1759.*

Preston stands about 12 miles from the Irish Sea near the mouth of the Ribble; on the banks of which, five miles below the town; they have a Wharf and Custom House, to which ships of burthen are navigable. An attempt was made here, eight years ago, to carry on a foreign trade; which, not being supported by a capital sufficient, has been since gradually declining. The staple trade of this place (as it was calld to us) is the business of the law; the Chancery Court of the Dutchy of Lancaster being held here, all the offices and registries necessary thereto are placed here, and the greater part of the best sort of inhabitants are lawers of various denominations, who rivalling one another in dress and appearance have acquired the title of poor and proud. Some intelligent person will describe t'ye the battle of 1715. A delightful terrace walk. The Black Bull a very good inn.

Thro' Garstang 21 m. to Lancaster. Nothing so remarkable on your road as the badness of the soil, and the husbandry thro' all this side of Lancashire; a great number of what they call mosses, producing nothing but peat or turff for firing; they account for the neglect of their husbandry, from the sea ports, mines and manufactures in the neighbourhood, draining the

country of their hands. The mountains of Westmorland raising their lofty heads before you, will strike you with their awfull aspect, tho' distant. You will be pleased with your approach to Lancaster. Ships of 300 tons burthen are navigable up the Lun, about seven miles, to that town. A complete quay wall of 200 yards length, with wharfs, built within these seven years. More than 40 ships employd in their trade to the West Indies, Africa, Portugal, Dublin etc. They import a large quantity of rum; build their own vessels; make their sail-cloath; have one ropery; and one sugar house. Here is also a particular manufactory of silk carried on by a Mr. Noble; in which he employs sometimes 200 hands, in working up the waste, that comes from dressing and twisting mills, into women's laces, ordinary stockings and sewing silk. The Castle, which is pretty intire, is their county goal. A delightful prospect from the Church Yard, which is on the same hill. Half a mile below the Quay, on the flat offshore, is their horse race course. The Sun is a very decent inn. From hence we made a very extraordinary deviation, over Cartmell sands, to that detachd corner of Lancashire calld Fourness, to visit a Mr. Bradyll at his seat near Ulverston:<sup>2</sup> nevertheless I can put you forward on your road; which is thro' Burton 23 m. to Kendall.

Here being upon the direct road to Carlisle, you may perhaps be tempted to waver about quitting it: but I hope you will not leave me in the lurch, and shall expect you to give me the meeting at Keswick; where I am sure you will thank me for my invitation. Along the side of Winander Mere and several other, thro' Stavley and Ambleside two villages, you have 29 m. thither; and the earlier in the morning you set out, the better, that you may have the more time to devote to the beauties of scenes, which I shall leave to your poetical pen to describe: I will only name some of the objects; at the extreme or north end of Winander Mere, you come to Ambleside, 13 m. from Kendall; (where we also joined this road from Fourness Fells) proceeding thence; Ridall Park, an old seat in ruins of Sr Wm. Fleming's; Gresse Mere; and, entering Cumberland, Wiburn Water; with several delicious valleys, will gratify your attention. Quitting these; you presently find yourself closely enviroind between walls of mountains upon mountains, where the sun will hardly reach you, except at noonday, and from whose heights, cataracts come tumbling down, which seem to threaten your horses' feet; pursuing for some time the windings of this narrow pass and wishing, in vain, at every turning, to

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Braddyll of Conishead Priory, who died in 1776.

see a possibility of escaping, you all at once burst forth upon one of the most enchanting scenes, this island produces; this is the Vale of Keswick: the Derwent Water with several small islands, but I shall not attempt to enumerate the beauties that are here presented to you; when you have treated your eyes with an unsatisfying repast, you will be prompted to seek one of another sort, by descending into the little town of Keswick below, at the foot of the Skiddow.<sup>3</sup>

The Sun will give you a very homely but hospitable reception, and after I have bid you welcome I must press you to spend the next day here at least. We were told it is four miles to the top o the Skiddow, if that should be clear and you should be desirous to mount it, I advise you to be out early in the morning, that you may be the less annoy'd by sun; and not to take your own horses, but such as you can get in the town, if horses are necessary.<sup>4</sup> In the neighbourhood are the only black-lead mines that supply all Europe, but they are seldom open'd. You will be shewn one island in the Derwent Water, which was the seat of the unfortunate Earl who took his title from thence. Leaving Keswick you cross the valley, and ascending the hills on the opposite side you have a view of Basingthwaite Mere, into which the Derwent Water runs, and from these lakes issues the river Derwent, which you will meet at Cockermouth. To that place you have about 18 m.; twelve of which to Lorton are thru' the mountains; approaching Cockermouth, the country softens down into a southern appearance fertile and pleasant. We made no stay in this town, but just to look into the ruinous Castle and to admire its delightful situation. If you do not chuse to stop, you have only ten very pleasant miles to Whitehaven partly over a hill; from which you have a view of the Irish Channel; the Isle of Man and south coast of Scotland.

You will be struck with the good appearance of Whitehaven at your approach; and more so, when you enter it, with the regularity of the streets and goodness of the buildings; the ornaments of which are of a beautiful red free-stone. The Indian King a dirty inn (the case in most seaports) but tolerable. The coal mines here are more convenient and agreeable to see than those at Newcastle. If you purpose this subterraneous expedition, it would not be improper for you to get a letter of recommendation to some merchant there, or to Mr. Spedding, Sir

<sup>3</sup> Crofts' description of the road from Grasmere to Keswick is a surprisingly early example of "Gothick"; the whole concept of travelling for pleasure through such country (and this is particularly true when he reaches Scotland) puts him well in the van of the Lakers.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that the ascent of Skiddaw was an apparently well organised pastime for visitors to Keswick even at this time.

James Lowther's superintendent. Your guides will be very carefull of you; and the having one day ascended into the regions of the air above the clouds; and the next descended into the bowels of the earth, a hundred fathom under the bed of the sea; furnishes an idea not the lest romantic that will occur in your travels. The steith or warehouse for holding the coals on the wharftide and the manner of bringing them from the pitts are worth your notice. 140 ships in the Virginia trade. A very large import of tobacco, greatest part of which is sent to France by Mr. Hall a contractor here. 3 roperies one sugar-house. 18,000 inhabitants.

Along the coast thro' Dissington 7 m. to Workington, a small port, employing about 80 ships in the coal trade, at the mouth of the Derwent; crossing which 4 m. to Elme-Foot, and smaller port for a colliery, belonging to Mr. Currant [*sic*]<sup>5</sup>. Still along the shore, if the tide is retreating, you will ride pleasantly upon a beach, four miles more, to Alonby; a little fishing village where if you are hungry you may dine humbly at the London Prentice. From thence over a barren heathy country, Solway Frith appearing to your left, you have 12 m. to the Queen's Head at Wigtown, where you will meet with decent entertainment tho' the town is small and no way remarkable, except for giving birth to the renown'd Dr Browne; whose father is rector of the parish. You have 12 m. from hence over a better country, as you approach, to Carlisle, the Bush in High-Street is the best, tho' a very indifferent, inn.

Carlisle is a small deserted, dirty city; poorly built, and poorly inhabited. The Cathedral is built of the red stone from Whitehaven; but one third of it gone ever since the grand Rebellion; what is left miserably ragged and dirty inside and out. This town having been considered as the key to Scotland to the west, is fortified quite round by a wall with bastions, and, on a small elevation to the north-east, a Castle; which is at present garrisoned by some companies of Invalids. The Rebels retreated hither in 1745, and kept possession of the town, till the Duke of Cumberland having raised a battery of guns brought from Whitehaven, on a hill against the westside of the Castle, the English, who were left here by their Scotch friends, surrender'd; and the heads of two Englishmen Banwick [*sic*]<sup>6</sup> and Chadwick are now exposed over the south Gate; as well as Hamilton's a Scotsman over the north Gate. No remains, are to be found in this neighbourhood, of the Roman Wall, but

<sup>5</sup> Henry Curwen of Workington, for whom see CW2 lviii 127 f.

<sup>6</sup> *recte* Berwick.

about five miles east of the town stands Corby Castle, well worth your visiting.

South-west from the Castle you see the Skiddow Mountain. Here is a manufacture of fustians, a large weekly market for wool, and a considerable salmon fishery. Crossing two bridges over the river Eden, you pass by the military road to Newcastle; and proceeding 5 m. on the bank of the river, you come to Rowcliff a little town, where I would recommend you to take a guide over the sands of Solway Frith and the influx of two small rivers. On the other side the Estuary, you enter Annandale in the county of Dumfries, and may congratulate yourself on your arrival in Scotland.