

Chapter XIX

1906

Church Congress : Holman Hunt : Bridges

Hardwicke took part in organizing the Church Congress of 1906, which was held in Barrow. Edith designed the Congress banner, which portrayed St. Kentigern with his staff, bell and robin, with a border of Runic knot-work, as found on an old Cumberland cross. She also supervised the ladies of the diocese who carried out the embroidery. At the Congress, Hardwicke read a paper on "Churchyard Memorials" with a view to discouraging large, ornate granite and marble monuments, which were fashionable at the time, but which he considered spoiled the look of churchyards. His second paper was entitled, "Recreation" and was concerned with the desirability of encouraging the habit of observing nature.

After this, Hardwicke visited the Leicester Galleries to see an exhibition of the paintings of Holman Hunt, and, on discovering that there was no example of his work in the national collection, he set about remedying the omission by suggesting the purchase of one of his paintings by public subscription. This idea was well received as Holman Hunt's book, The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, had recently been published and had achieved a wide readership. At first it was planned to buy, "The Lady of Shalott", but the price was £7,000 which seemed to be too ambitious at the time, as the rest of the £12,000 for the purchase of Gowbarrow Fell was still being raised. After taking advice, Lord Carlisle suggested, "The Ship", as being a good example of the artist's work. This was agreed and the picture was bought for eight hundred guineas and placed in the Tate Gallery.

Holman Hunt was deeply moved by this action, which coincided with his eightieth birthday and wrote to Hardwicke on the 3 April 1907, thanking him, his committee and subscribers, for their efforts, explaining how he came to paint the picture thirty years

previously in 1876, and what he had tried to express in the painting. He had been sailing on a Peninsular and Oriental steamer, when he was overwhelmed by thoughts about a ship sailing across seas and oceans, under the vastness of the heavens and stars, carrying a cargo of humanity, with all its mixture of "human joys and woes". For the rest of the journey he made elaborate sketches by day and night and on arriving at Jerusalem, he painted the picture while all his ideas were fresh in his mind.

On later visits to the artist, Hardwicke discovered that he cared greatly for the picture, which had cost him a great deal of thought and labour. He had been influenced by reading Tennyson's "In Memoriam", especially Stanza X:-

"I hear the noise about the keel;
I hear the bell struck in the night
I see the cabin window bright;
I see the sailor at the wheel."

In the picture, the homeless girl is gazing up at the starry heavens, seeking hope. The ship's cat rubbing against her knees gives her comfort and reminds her of the home, where there was another such cat. The man at the helm looking after the ship, and the "good of all of us, as the Greater Helmsman steers our ship of life through fair and foul."

In 1907, Portinscale Bridge was condemned by the highway authorities as not suitable or safe for modern needs, i.e. for the strain of motor traffic. The official report demanded that it should be pulled down and replaced by a new one. At once, Hardwicke with Mr. Robert Slack and Mr. Frank Marshall, contested the ruling and rallied public support. The battle continued for seven years.

By chance, in 1906, Mr. Francis Fox (later Sir Francis) stayed with the Rawnsleys at the Vicarage. He had supervised the restoration of Winchester Cathedral, restoring the masonry by the use of a grouting machine. Hardwicke was very interested in this process, which involved forcing liquid Portland cement into all the cracks

and cavities of the stonework. When this hardened, it made the ancient stonework very strong. It occurred to Hardwicke that this system might be suitable for use on the bridge and consequently he invited Mr. Fox to come and examine it. After doing so, he communicated his opinion to the Chairman of the County Council and Hardwicke, that the bridge could be restored by the use of the grouting process, for a quarter of the cost of building a new structure. Ratepayers signed a petition organised by the three protestors and the Highways Committee agreed to try the grouting system on the smaller bridges at Grange in Borrowdale, which were in need of repair. This work was completed in 1909 and then time had to be allowed to see if the experiment worked. The matter appeared to be settled, as the repairs appeared to be successful. In 1911, however, the Highways Committee decided to remove the Portinscale Bridge, at once. A new petition was hastily organized by Hardwicke and his supporters which was signed by practically every ratepayer in Keswick and Portinscale. They received further support from the Secretary of the R.A.C., which had twenty five thousand members at that time, who pointed out that motorists want to enjoy the scenery, not to "scorch through it". Hardwicke immediately dashed off to London to consult with the Speaker of the House, Mr. J.W. Lowther, who was also the M.P. for the area. He also continued relentlessly to organize petitions and bombarded the press with letters.

Finally, to prove their confidence in the grouting system, Mr. Robert Slack and Hardwicke guaranteed to refund the estimate of £900 to the County Council, if after three years it failed to be satisfactory. Under this immense pressure, the County Council arranged a public enquiry in April 1912, when all opinions were listened to and the whole problem given a thorough airing. The result was a victory, for those in favour of saving the bridge by using the grouting process, under the direction of Mr. Fox. The work was completed successfully in 1913, saving a great deal of money for ratepayers and as *The Times* pointed out, having wider implications throughout Great Britain in preventing the destruction of ancient bridges.

In spite of this pronouncement, the following year, 1914, as war was beginning, another bridge was under threat. This was Greta Bridge at Keswick. The Highways Committee considered it to be too narrow for the increased traffic and proposed that it should be removed and replaced by a new one made of ferro-concrete, designed artistically, at a cost of £2,600. Such a suggestion was anathema to Hardwicke, who suggested, as the bridge was structurally sound, it could be widened, as had already been done to some pack horse bridges, to make them suitable for wheeled traffic. This could be carried out using local stone, costing, according to the County Surveyor, roughly £700. There was wide support locally for this solution, including that of the Urban District Council.

As usual, Hardwicke continued his campaign in the press and had good publicity in the local paper, the *Cumberland and Westmorland Herald* and the *Manchester Guardian*. He wrote about the historical and literary associations of the bridge. Originally, it had been a wooden structure built by German miners in 1569, which the present structure had replaced. S.T. Coleridge and Robert Southey had lived at Greta Hall, which looked down upon the bridge. Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth's friend, had exhibited his first oil painting, which depicted the bridge, in the Academy at the beginning of the previous century. Large numbers of tourists visited Keswick to enjoy the beauty of the Lake District and to look at these places of interest, bringing trade to shops, guest houses and hotels. It would be foolish, he argued, to destroy old and beautiful things in which people were interested, when it was not necessary.

A public meeting was held and many influential people, including Mr. Rowley of the Derwentwater Hotel, with Manchester connections; Mr. J.W. Lowther, M.P. and Speaker of the House; Lord Rochdale; W.G. Collingwood, author of *The Lake Counties* and close friend of Ruskin; Mr. F.E. Marshall; Dr. Knight and Thomas Hodgson, one of the oldest native born inhabitants of Keswick, all supported the idea of strengthening and widening the existing bridge.

Hardwicke said that he had lived in the valley for thirty years, during which time there had been only one accident. He thought the widening scheme would be helpful to old people and children, the wider footpaths being an added safety factor. Technical details from the Highways Committee about flooding, sand and gravel were passed over as being best left to experts.

Sir John Randles, in moving the resolution for widening the old bridge, caused much laughter by saying that he was not an orator like Hardwicke and the people did not come to Keswick to see the inhabitants, or even Hardwicke, but to see the beauty of the area. Mr. Robert Slack in seconding the motion, said that the County Council had been courteous and helpful over the Portinscale Bridge and hoped this would continue over the Greta Bridge problem. After discussing further details about footpaths and announcing that not one voice had been raised in favour of the concrete, Mr. Wivell concluded by saying, "There is no one like Canon Rawnsley in all England. There is only one Canon." To which Hardwicke replied, "If you talk like that the cannon may go off."

In the event, as war broke out, the project was deferred. Notices were posted to the effect that motor vehicles must limit their speed to 4-5 m.p.h. The bridge was rebuilt in 1926.