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978-1-108-06676-1 - *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England: Particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland: Volume 1*

William Gilpin

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### **Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England**

Clergyman, schoolmaster and writer on aesthetics, William Gilpin (1724–1804) is best known for his works on the picturesque. In his *Essay on Prints*, published in 1768 and reissued in this series, he defined picturesque as ‘a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture.’ First published in 1786, this two-volume work formed part of a successful series which recorded his reflections on the picturesque across British landscapes. It traces the journey he made in 1772, equipped with notebook and sketching materials, in the Lake District. Describing his route from southern England, noting highlights along the way, Volume 1 includes discussion of Furness, Windermere and Keswick. The volume also features several reproductions of Gilpin’s pen-and-wash drawings. Further exploring the concept of the picturesque, his volumes of *Observations* on other parts of Britain are also reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection.

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VOLUME 1

WILLIAM GILPIN



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O B S E R V A T I O N S

O N T H E

M O U N T A I N S, A N D L A K E S

O F

Cumberland, and Westmoreland.

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Made in the YEAR 1772,  
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PARTICULARLY THE  
MOUNTAINS, AND LAKES  
OF  
CUMBERLAND, AND WESTMORELAND.

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V O L. I.

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By WILLIAM GILPIN, M. A.

PREBENDARY OF SALISBURY;

A N D

VICAR OF BOLDRE, IN NEW-FOREST, NEAR LYMINGTON.

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L O N D O N;  
PRINTED FOR R. BLAMIRE, STRAND.

M.DCC.LXXXVI.

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T O T H E  
Q U E E N.

M A D A M,

AS your Majesty condescended to look into the following papers, when they were in manuscript; I hoped You would not think it presumption in me to ask your royal permission to present them to You in their more improved state: and it gave me peculiar pleasure to ask this permission through the mediation of a Lady, whose very respectable

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able

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able character, and revered age (then bowing under one of the severest of God's dispensations) the King and your Majesty took under your protection; and with an amiable attention, perhaps unequalled in the annals of royalty, have made that protection much less valuable, even in it's bounty, than in that easy grace, which accompanies it; and which, in the same moment, confers, and annihilates, the obligation.

That your Majesties may be long preserved to enjoy the elegant amusement of the polite arts, which You are so ready to encourage; and the  
heart-

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heart-felt satisfaction of the sublimest  
virtues, which You thus exemplify,  
is the sincere prayer of,

M A D A M,

Your MAJESTY's most respectful,

most obedient,

and very humble servant,

WILLIAM GILPIN.

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## P R E F A C E.

**T**HE following observations on various scenes of English landscape, were written about thirteen years ago. They were at first thrown together, warm from the subject, each evening, after the scene of the day had been presented; and in a moment of more leisure, were corrected, and put into form—but merely for the amusement of the writer himself; who had not, in truth, at that time, the least idea of their being able to furnish amusement to any body else. A few only of his friends saw them. One of them however

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saw

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saw them with so partial an eye, that he thought proper to mention them to the public\*. This raised the curiosity of many; and laid the author under the necessity of producing his papers to a wider circle: but still without any design of publishing them. A sense of their imperfections; and of the many difficulties, in which such a work, would engage him, prevented any intention of that kind.

Among others, who desired to see them, was the late duchess dowager of Portland; a lady, of whose superior character the world is well informed. Having seen them soon after they were written, and a second time after an interval of seven, or eight years, her Grace pressed the author to print them; most obligingly offering to facilitate an expensive publication by contributing largely to a subscription. Tho' the author chose to decline that mode of publication, yet the duchess's persuasion was among his principal inducements to prepare his papers

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\* Mafon's memoirs of Gray, p. 377.

for

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for the public. The prefs-work was about half completed at the time of her Grace's death.

But tho this work hath been thus flattered; and hath received confiderable improvements, both from the author himfelf, during the many years it has lain by him; and from feveral of his ingenious friends; yet ftill he offers it to the public with apprehenfion.

His apprehenfion is firft grounded on the inadequate time he had to employ in making obfervations on the feveral landfcapes he has defcribed. No one can paint a country properly, unlefs he hath feen it in various lights. The following defcriptions are faithful copies, it is hoped, of each fcene, under the circumftances, in which it appeared, at the time it was defcribed. But he, who fhould fee any one fcene, as it is differently affected by a lowering fky, or a bright one, might probably

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see two very different landscapes. He might not only see distances blotted out; or splendidly exhibited: but he might even see variations produced in the very objects themselves; and that merely from the different times of the day, in which they were examined. The summit of a mountain, for instance, which in a morning appears round, may discover, when enlightened by an evening ray, a double top. Rocks, and woods take different shapes from the different directions of light; while the hues and tints of objects (on which their effect, in a great measure, depends) are continually changing. Nay we sometimes see (in a mountainous country especially) a variation of light alter the whole disposition of a landscape. In a warm sunshine the purple hills may skirt the horizon, and appear broken into numberless pleasing forms: but under a fullen sky a total change may be produced: the distant mountains, and all their beautiful projections may disappear, and their place be occupied by a dead flat.



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flat. All the author could do to obviate difficulties of this kind, was to specify in general, under what kind of light and weather, the several landscapes he saw, were exhibited.

In his views of lake-scenery indeed (which form the principal part of the following work) he has less cause to fear; and offers his observations with more confidence. Among these scenes he rested some time: and tho he saw each scene but once; yet as he spent near a week among them, he saw so much of their varieties, that he could make allowances for the effects of light and weather; and could speak of them, in general, with more precision.

He is under another apprehension from the variations, which *time*, as well as *weather*, produces in scenery. Even the wild features of nature suffer continual change from various causes—inclosures—canals—quarries—buildings—and, above all, from the growth, or de-

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destruction, of timber. And if the wild scenes of nature suffer change; how much more may we expect to observe it in the improvement of particular places, which are professedly altering with the taste, or fancy of their owners? Few of these scenes continue long the same. The growth of trees, and shrubs is continually making changes in them, even in a natural course. It is probable therefore, that many of the embellished scenes, described in the following work, are now totally changed; and that the author hath rather exhibited a history of the past, than a representation of the present. Thirteen, or fourteen years bring a shrub to perfection. After that period, if the knife be not freely used, a shrubbery, from mere natural causes, will of itself decay.

Lake-scenery, it is true, is less subject to change. The broader the features are, the less they will vary. Water, which makes the grand part of this kind of scenery, remains unaltered by time: and the rocks, and mountains, which environ the lake, are as little subject to variation,

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variation, as any of the materials of landscape can be. Wood is the only feature, which can have suffered any considerable change. In this indeed great devastation hath been made in several of the northern lakes, especially in that of Kefwick.

Those beautiful scenes produced formerly great quantities of valuable timber; which adorned the banks of the lake, and enriched it's lofty skreens. But after the rebellion of the year 1715; these lands, together with all the other estates of the unfortunate earl of Derwentwater, were forfeited to the crown; and were given by George I. to increase the endowment of Greenwich-hospital; the trustees of which immediately sold, and cut down, almost all the timber.

Before this depredation, the lake of Kefwick was a glorious scene. No one however now remembers it in it's splendor. Since that time it hath suffered little change. Yet some it hath suffered. Two woods, neither of them inconsiderable, on the two opposite sides of the lake,

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lake, one belonging to the Derwentwater estate, the other to lord Egremont, have been destroyed. The author uses the word *destroyed*, because of the barbarous method of cutting timber, which prevails in the northern counties. In the south of England the proprietor sends an experienced surveyor into his woods, who marks such timber as is fit for the axe; leaving all the young thriving trees behind. The wood therefore, if fenced, soon rears again its ancient honours, and becomes a perennial nursery. In the north it is otherwise. There the merchant agrees for the wood altogether as it stands; and the proprietor, for the sake of a present advantage, suffers him to lay the whole flat. Nothing but a copse springs up in its room; and all succession of timber is prevented. This hath operated, among other causes, in the general destruction of timber in the northern counties.

The author believes the lake of Keswick hath suffered these two last mentioned depreciations since the following remarks were made:

but

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but as he is informed the underwood hath increased considerably, and hath in many parts added some degree of richness to the mountains, and promontaries around the lake; he is not apprehensive, that any changes, in so short an interval, can in any material way affect his descriptions. It is true, there will ever be a great difference between the grandeur of a wood, and the poverty of a copse; and *on the spot* it will be evident enough: but in all the *distances* of these extensive views, it will not so easily be observed.

Another ground of the author's apprehension, is, that he may be thought too severe in his strictures *on scenes of art*. The grand natural scene, will always appear so superior to the embellished artificial one; that the picturesque eye in contemplating the former, will be too apt to look contemptuously on the latter. This is just as arrogant, as to despise a propriety, because it cannot be classed with  
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a cardinal virtue. Each mode of scenery hath its station. A wild forest scene contiguous to a noble mansion, would be just as absurd; as an embellished one, in the midst of a forest.

A house is an *artificial* object; and the scenery around it, *must*, in some degree, partake of *art*. Propriety requires it: convenience demands it. But if it partake of *art*, as allied to the *mansion*; it should also partake of *nature*, as allied to the *country*. It has therefore two characters to support; and may be considered as the connecting thread between the regularity of the house, and the freedom of the natural scene. These two characters it should ever have in view.

Under this regulation, the business of the embellished scene, is to make every thing convenient, and comfortable around the house—to remove offensive objects, and to add a pleasing foreground to the distance. If there be no distance, it must depend the more on its own beauties. But still, in every circumstance, it must well observe its double character; and

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and discover as much of the simplicity of nature, as is consistent with its artificial alliance. If the scene be large, it throws off art, by degrees, the more it recedes from the mansion, and approaches the country.

It is true, we cannot well admit the embellished scene among objects *purely picturesque*. It is too trim, and neat for the pencil; which ever delights in the bold, free, negligent strokes, and roughnesses of nature—abhorring, in its wild sallies, the least intrusion of art—or however allowing only the admission of such objects, as have about them the carelessness, the simplicity, and the freedom of nature. Such in a particular manner are ruins. Objects indeed of a more formal kind, as buildings, and shipping, are suffered—sometimes for the sake of contrast—and sometimes for the pleasing ideas they excite: but as objects of picturesque beauty, we utterly reject them, till they have deposited all their square formalities. The building must be thrown into perspective; the ship foreshortened, and its sails varied, before they must

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must presume to attract the notice of the picturesque eye.

The embellished scene hath still more of this formal mixture. But tho it is not enough marked with the bold, free characters of nature, to be purely picturesque; it is still, under it's proper regulations, a very beautiful species of landscape. It hath beauties peculiar to itself; and if it astonish us not with grandeur, and sublimity; it pleases with symmetry, and elegance.

In the body of his book, the author hath ventured to call the *embellished scene*, one of the peculiar features of English landscape\*. But we must still lament, that this beautiful mode of composition, is oftener aimed at, than attained. It's double alliance with art, and nature, is rarely observed with perfect impartiality. Ambitious ornaments generally take the lead; and nature is left behind.

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\* See page 9.

Where



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Where little improprieties offend, they are readily passed over. But where the offence against nature becomes capital, it is not easy to repress indignation.

In so extensive a tour as the following pages contain, it must be supposed, that a variety of very disgusting scenes of this kind would occur—scenes, in which nature was forced—in which she was arrayed in alien beauties—or overloaded with tawdry ornaments. In truth, such scenes often did occur. But the author, however severe he may be thought, hath endeavoured to proceed on principles, which he hoped could not reasonably give offence. He studiously checked all severity of criticism, where the improver *still enjoyed his scene*. It would have hurt him to have disturbed the *innocent*, (tho perhaps *tasteless*,) amusements of any one. Tho he should not have chosen to speak sentiments not his own: yet he could always be silent; or look aside, where he did not wish to examine. But where the improver of the scene was dead, especially when his works were

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*published*, by being thrown open to curiosity; the author thought himself at perfect liberty. All such scenes he considered as fair game. He hath without scruple therefore remarked freely upon them; and hath endeavoured to point out the many strange errors, and absurdities, to which an inattention to nature hath given birth:

———— quorum, velut ægri fomniæ, vanæ

Finguntur species: ut nec pes, nec caput uni

Reddatur formæ—————

But even here he hath avoided *all general, unmarked censure*, which he considers as the garb of *slander*. He hath always accompanied his *criticisms* with *reasons*; and if the reason have no force, the criticism falls of course.

It may be objected perhaps, that the author hath wrought up many of his descriptions, in the following work, higher, than the simplicity of profaic language may allow. Simplicity, no doubt, is the foundation of beauty in every species

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species of composition: but the simplicity of a familiar letter differs from the simplicity of history; and the simplicity of a poem, from the simplicity of both—that is, one work may be more highly coloured than another; and wrought up with warmer language, and a greater variety of images. Now the following work, at least the descriptive parts of it, approach as near the idea of poetic composition, as any kind of profane writing can do. It is the aim of *picturesque description* to bring the images of nature, as forcibly, and as closely to the eye, as it can; and this must often be done by high-colouring; which this species of composition demands. By *high-colouring* is not meant *a string of rapturous epithets*, (which is the feeblest mode of description) but an attempt to analyze the views of nature—to open their several parts, in order to shew the effect of a whole—to mark their tints, and varied lights—and to express all this detail in terms as appropriate, and yet as vivid, as possible. In attempting this, if the language be *forced*, and *inflated*, no doubt

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it is the juſt object of criticiſm: but if, tho highly coloured, it keep within the

*Deſcriptas vices, operifque colores,*

it may be hoped, it will eſcape cenſure.

The author fears too, he may be called on to apologize for the many digreſſions he hath made. But if in this point he hath erred; he hath erred with his beſt judgment. Whether his work be conſidered as didactic, or deſcriptive (as in fact it is intended to be a ſpecies between both) he thought it wanted ſome little occaſional relief. Travelling continually among rocks, and mountains; hills, and vallies; and remarking upon them, he feared might be tedious: and therefore, when any obſervations, anecdote, or hiſtory, grew naturally from his ſubject, he was glad to take the advantage of it; and draw the reader a little aſide, that he might return to the principal object with leſs fatiety. This too is poetic licence. What in  
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argument would be absurd; in works of amusement may be necessary. If any of these digressions however should appear forced—out of place—or unconnected with the subject; for *them* he wishes to apologize.

The author hopes no one will be so severe, as to think a work of this kind (tho a work only of amusement) inconsistent with the profession of a clergyman. He means not to address himself to the lax notions of the age; to which he is no way apprehensive of giving offence: but he should be sorry to hurt the feelings of the most serious. How far field sports, and a variety of other diversions, which may be proper in some stations, are quite agreeable to the clerical one, is a subject he means not to discuss: Yet surely the study of nature, in every shape, is allowable; and affords amusement, which the severest cannot well reprehend—the study of the heavens—of the earth—of the field—of the garden, it's productions,

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fruits, and flowers—of the bowels of the earth, containing such amazing stores of curiosity—and of animal life, through all it's astonishing varieties, even to the shell, and the insect. Among these objects of rational amusement, may we not enumerate also the beautiful appearances of the face of nature?

The ground indeed, which the author hath taken, that of examining landscape by the *rules of picturesque beauty*, seems rather a deviation from *nature* to *art*. Yet, in fact, it is not so: for the *rules of picturesque beauty*, we know, are drawn from *nature*: so that to examine the face of nature by these rules, is no more than to examine nature by her own most beautiful exertions. Thus Shakespear:

————— There is an art,  
Which does mend Nature—change it rather: but  
That art itself is Nature—————

The author however hopes, he should not greatly err, if he allowed also the amusements furnished by the three sister-arts, to be all very consistent with the strictest rules of the clerical profession. The only danger is, lest the *amusement*