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978-1-108-06712-6 - Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent:
Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Summer of the Year 1774

William Gilpin

Excerpt

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

ON THE COASTS OF

HAMPSHIRE, SUSSEX, AND KENT,

&c. &c. &c.

SECTION I.

Water essential in landscape—its several uses—forest scenery, and ruins excepted—river scenery—lake scenery—sea-coast views—their distinct characters—grand ideas which belong to coast views—coast of England compared with those of Norway and the Mediterranean—how a coast view should best be taken.

THE value of water in landscape arises both from its *own beauty*, and its use *in composition*. Its resplendency—its lights and shadows—its reflections—and the variety of its surface, when calm, ruffled, or agitated, are all circumstances of *innate beauty*. In *composition* it is accommodating to various objects. It opposes a flat surface to a prominent one,

B smoothness

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smoothness to roughness, and transparency to opacity. It accommodates itself also, with the same ease, to every form of country by the various shapes which its flexibility assumes. On the *plain* it rolls majestically along, in the form of a deep-winding river. In a *mountainous country* it becomes sometimes a lake, sometimes a furious torrent broken among shelves and rocks; or it precipitates itself in some headlong cascade. Again, when it goes to sea, it sometimes covers half a hemisphere with molten glass; or it rolls about in awful swells: and when it approaches the shore it breaks gently into curling waves, or dashes itself into foam against opposing promontories.

Water, therefore, is one of the grand accompaniments of landscape. So essential is it in adorning a view, that some of the most pleasing compositions fall under one or other of these three heads, *river scenery*—*lake scenery*—or *sea-coast views*.—The characteristics of these several modes are often blended; but in their simple forms, the first partakes most of *beauty*—the second *introduces grandeur*, on which the third *almost entirely depends*.

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pretension) we may add those vast masses of light and shade which the ocean exhibits; and which often spreading many leagues unbroken and undisturbed, yet gradually fading away, give instances of grandeur which no land illumination can reach. To this we may add the brilliant hues, which are continually playing on the surface of a quiet ocean. Beautiful, no doubt, in a high degree are those glimmering tints which often invest the tops of mountains: but they are mere corruscations compared with these marine colours, which are continually varying and shifting into each other in all the vivid splendour of the rainbow, through the space often of several leagues.

To these grand ideas, which accompany the *stillness* of the ocean, we may add the sublimity of *storms*. A raging sea, no doubt, breaks the *uniformity of light and colour*; and destroys, of course, that grandeur in the ocean which arises from *the continuation of the same idea*. But it substitutes another species of grandeur in its room. It substitutes immense masses of water, rising in some parts to an awful height, and sinking in others into dark abysses; rolling in vast volumes clashing

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ing with each other; then breaking and flashing light in every direction. All this is among the grandest exhibitions that water presents.

Now every circumstance of grandeur which generally accompanies a sea-coast view may be found, I should suppose, in one part or other of the shores of Britain. Its bays, rocks, and promontories are particularly picturesque. More magnificent they may be in Norway and other northern regions. But magnificence, when carried into *disproportion*, is carried too far for picturesque use. The human eye is capable only of comparing objects within a given circumference. It may indeed bring the largest within the sphere of vision by removing them to a proper distance. But this must necessarily diminish their grandeur.

On the whole, therefore, the coasts of this island, perhaps, especially its northern parts, are equal to any other in that species of grandeur which is *most suited to picturesque use*. I have heard indeed that the coasts of the Mediterranean, of the Egean, and other seas, which are less buffeted by raging storms than ours, have *more beauty*. And this may
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be true. They may be more beautifully decorated with wood and buildings—they may wind often into more picturesque bays—and often perhaps exhibit scenes of grandeur. The Riviere of Genoa, where the Alps and Appennines unite, and the shores also of Epirus, are said to be particularly grand. But I should suppose the coasts of Britain, especially if we add those of Ireland, are not behind them in beauty and picturesque grandeur; and that a circuit round our own island, to collect the several scenes it presents, would furnish a few volumes of drawings and verbal description, as amusing, perhaps, as could be collected from any other coasts.—From the little attempt in the following pages, which pursue only a small part of the British coast, and that one of the tamest, some idea may be formed of the materials which might be collected from its more interesting scenes.

Here a question might arise, whether views of this kind are more advantageously taken on shore, or in a voyage along the coast. To execute such a scheme *completely*, no doubt, it would *occasionally* be necessary to examine many projecting parts from the sea.

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But if either was *singly to be adopted*, the land station is certainly the more eligible, both, because, at sea the point is too low, and because it denies a foreground, unless we supply one artificially.

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SECTION II.

*Retrospect of Guildford—road to Godalmin—town of Godalmin—country between Godalmin and Petersfield—another road by Haslemere—singular piece of ground—fir groves—part of Waltham forest—view of the sea—timber—beautiful road through part of Bare forest—view of Portsmouth and its environs from Portsdown-hill—*island of Portsea.**

THE country from Cheam to Guildford was familiar to us.* From Guildford we took the road by Petersfield to Portsmouth. Guildford castle, though a heavy square tower, has a good effect in retrospect, along the Godalmin road, where the town appears to advantage, rising a steep hill. The castle takes a still higher stand, and overlooks it.

About a mile beyond Guildford we are struck with the beautiful ruins of a chapel, on an elevated ground, shaded with wood. It seems to have been built in good proportion, though without any rich Gothic ornament.

* See it described in the Western Tour.

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The whole road to Godalmin is amusing, winding among lanes shaded with trees. The town itself stands pleasantly in a sort of amphitheatre, surrounded by low, woody hills. The church is particularly picturesque.

From Godalmin the road continues amusing about three miles farther; when we enter a bleak heathy country, which runs several miles, with little interruption. Where the heaths are interrupted, they are connected with woody lanes. These heaths, however, are far from being totally void of beauty. They are commonly bold sweeps of high ground, from which we have extensive views, particularly on the left, of a rich cultivated country, adorned with great profusion of wood. In many places the groves and corners of woods came brushing up in rich scenery, to the very tops of the high grounds on which we rode; or formed pleasant bays at the bottom. —Near Liphook, we passed under a row of Spanish chesnuts, which are noble trees, though a shepherd, who said his age was forty-nine, remembered the planting of them. It is near thirty years since I saw them.