

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

O B S E R V A T I O N S  
O N S E V E R A L  
Parts of GREAT BRITAIN;  
P A R T I C U L A R L Y T H E  
H I G H L A N D S o f S C O T L A N D.

---

S E C T. XXI.

**W**E left the scenes of Inverary with regret; those scenes, in which the grand and beautiful are as harmoniously combined as we almost in any place remembered to have seen them. We approached it through magnificent woods; and we left it through a succession of lake-scenery, still more magnificent. Ten miles we travelled along the confines of Loch-Fyne, skirting that grand opening, which it forms to the north east.

It's skreens are every where equal to the expanse of it's waters. They are indeed chiefly

VOL. II.

B

naked,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 2 )

naked, and want some munificent hand to spread a little sylvan drapery upon their bare, enormous sides. But what they lose in beauty, they gain in grandeur.

Their situation also upon the lake operated as another cause, to impress the idea of grandeur. Nothing exalts the dignity of a mountain so much, as its rising from the water's edge. In measuring it, as it appears connected with the ground, the eye knows not where to begin, but continues creeping up in quest of a base, till half the mountain is lost. But a water-line prevents this ambiguity; and to the height of the mountain even adds the edging at the bottom, which naturally belongs not to it. Thus the mountain of Doniquaick, seen from the new inn at Inverary, appears as if it rose from the water's edge, tho in fact the duke of Argyle's lawn intervenes, all which the mountain appropriates: and tho it measures only eight hundred and thirty-five feet, it has a more respectable appearance, than many mountains of twice its height unconnected with water.

But these screens, tho the grand idea is principally impressed upon them, are not totally devoid of *beauty*. Two circumstances  
in

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 3 )

in a lake-skreen produce this quality; the line, which it's *summits* form; and the *water-line*, which is formed by projections into the lake\*.

Of these modes of beauty we had great profusion; and might have filled volumes with sketches: but unless there is something in a scene besides these beautiful lines, something which is striking, and characteristic, it has little effect, we have seen, in artificial landscape.

Uncharacterized scenery is still less adapted to *drawing*, the beauty of which depends chiefly on composition, and the distribution of light. In *painting* indeed, colouring may give it some value; but in *drawing*, something more interesting is required to fix the eye; some consequential part, to which the other parts of the composition are appendages.

In our whole ride round this extensive bay of Loch-Fyne, we met only one object of any consequence to mark the scenery. It was a ruined castle upon a low peninsula. The lake spread in a bay before it, and behind it

---

\* See this subject treated at large in Observations on the lakes and mountains of Cumberland, &c. p. 82 and 95.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 4 )

hung a grand curtain of distant mountains; one of which is marked with a peculiar feature—that of a vast ridge sloping towards the eye.

We now approached the end of the lake, where, in the seaman's phrase, we *raked* a long reach of it. When we view it in this direction, and conceive ourselves at the head of a bay of salt water, sixty or seventy fathoms deep, four miles in breadth, and at least fifty from the sea, we have a grand idea of the immense cavern, which is scooped out between these ranges of mountains, as the receptacle of this bed of waters. If we could have seen it immediately after the diluvian crash, or whatever convulsion of nature occasioned it, before the waters gushed in, what a horrid chasm must it have appeared!

Ideas of this kind seem to explain a difficult passage in Tacitus. In describing the Caledonian coast, he observes that, *Nusquam latius dominari mare; multum fluminum huc, atque illuc ferre; nec litore tenuis accrescere, aut resorberi; sed influere penitus, atque ambire, etiam jugis atque montibus inferi, velut in suo\**.

---

\* In vita Agric.

Some

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 5 )

Some explain this passage, as if the sea would sometimes cover even the tops of the mountains. Others, among whom is the learned Gronovius, † laying the stress upon the word *ambire*, and arbitrarily changing *velut in suo* into *velut insulis*, make the sea, instead of covering the mountains in its rage, only to surround them, and form them into islands.

Neither of these interpretations can well be the historian's meaning, as they both imply the sea to be in an agitated state: whereas he had just before told us, that these seas were scarce ever known to be agitated. *Pigrum, et grave remigantibus perhibent; ne ventis quidem proinde attolli:* and this information he seems himself to have believed; giving physical reasons, such as they are, to ascertain its probability. We are constrained therefore to illustrate this passage in some sense exclusive of that dominion of the sea, which it exercises in a storm.

Two other species of its dominion over the land, seem to be alluded to; the dominion of tides, and that dominion, which it seems

---

† In a note in his edition of Tacitus, which he seems to approve.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 6 )

to assert, by running up in creeks into the country. I should therefore translate the passage thus: *Over no country the sea asserts more dominion. In various parts it meets the mouths of rivers; and not only washes the shores with the flux, and reflux of it's tides; but flows boldly up the country, winds round vast stretches of hills, and mountains; and makes deep inroads into the land, as if it were it's natural channel.* —There cannot be a better comment upon this passage, than the western coast of Scotland; which may in some degree therefore ascertain the truth of the translation.

Having doubled the northern point of Loch-Fyne, we came to Carndow, which consists only of a few inconsiderable houses; and turning to the left, we pursued our rout in quest of the scenes of Loch-Lomond. Our road led through the valley of Kinlas, which is one of the wildest, and most sublime vallies we had yet met with. The two ranges of mountains, which form it's skreens, approach within two or three hundred yards. We were immured between them\*. Moun-

---

\* See a scene of this kind described, in *Observations on lakes, and mountains, &c.* vol. I. p. 209.

tains



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 7 )

tains brought near the eye, like objects in a microscope, appear monstrous. They require distance to give them softness; and remove deformities. But these mountains had few deformities to remove. They were magnificent; and yet well proportioned: bare of wood indeed, but rich from a varied and broken surface.

—————Their contrasts broad,  
And careless lines, and undulating forms  
Played through the varied scene.

Through the valley ran a stream, tumbling violently over the rocky fragments, that opposed its course: and to complete the grandeur of the whole, the sky happened to harmonize with the mountains, shaping the clouds into those grand forms, which Virgil calls the *cava nubila cæli*; and Shakespear, still more expressively, *the cloudy cheeks of heaven*—those swelling forms, which present so strongly the idea of puffed cheeks. Shakespear's idea may be inelegant: but it is exact; and the forms themselves are very picturesque.

It is a happy circumstance, when we find a sky thus suited to a landscape. In point of *harmony of colouring* the sky and landscape seldom vary. The former generally impresses

B 4

it's

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06940-3 - Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain: Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland: Volume 2

William Gilpin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## ( 8 )

it's ruling tint on the latter. But the *harmony of composition* is another point; and is not always so exactly found. Tho' the general tint of the sky may be harmonious; the clouds may still be ill formed, and unpicturesque. And it cannot be otherwise: for among all the appearances of nature, nothing assumes such variety of shapes, as these floating bodies. Amidst this variety there must often be bad forms. The painter therefore takes care not only to impress the ruling tint of the sky on his landscape; but also to get a good modulation of the sky, in that key, if I may so speak, which he hath chosen.

No precise rules in the choice of a sky can be given: nor in the adapting of skies to landscape. This latter especially is matter of taste rather, than of rule. In general, clouds in large masses, like those, which gave occasion to these remarks, are more beautiful, than when they are frittered. Large swelling fleecy clouds on a blue sky are often beautiful. A few light floating clouds (yet rather contiguous,) in one part of the sky; when the other part is of a uniform tint, has the effect of contrast. It is a beautiful species of sky also, when the dark part melts gradually into the  
the