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978-1-108-06991-5 - Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex: Also on Several Parts of North Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, in Two Tours, the Former Made in the Year 1769, the Latter in the Year 1773

William Gilpin

Excerpt

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OBSERVATIONS

ON

CAMBRIDGE, NORFOLK, &c.

SECTION I.

THE following remarks were the result of a hasty tour through Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk. The principal view indeed of this journey, was to examine Lord Orford's pictures at Houghton-hall; which I mention as an apology for dwelling so long on so disproportioned a part.

The Essex road, as we leave London, makes a short turn from Clapton to Lea-bridge; beyond which it crosses the meadows in a direct line, and cuts at right angles a woody horizon, consisting of a distant view of Epping-forest. The meadows are flat, and the Lea, of
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course, is sluggish. Little beauty can result either from one, or the other.

From hence the road leads into close lanes ; and the country continuing flat, seldom opens into a distance. Wherever an opening presents itself, it is crowded with buildings, which are the fatiguing objects in every part of the environs of London. So great a number of them, instead of adorning landscape, distract the eye, and destroy all idea of unity. One object, or two, in a view, is sufficient ; but not such as we meet with here.

Epping-forest is in many parts little better than a barren heath. About Snarebrook we found it wild, woody, and picturesque.

Lord Tilney's at Wansted, built by Colin Campbell, perhaps of all the great houses in England, answers best the united purposes of grandeur, and convenience. The plan is simple, but magnificent. The front extends two hundred, and sixty feet. A hall, and a saloon occupy the body of the house, forming the center of each front. From these run a double

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row of chambers. Nothing can exceed their convenience. They communicate in one grand suite; and yet each, by the addition of a back stair, becomes a separate apartment. — It is difficult to say, whether we are better pleased with the grandeur and elegance without; or with the simplicity, and contrivance within.

The chambers are furnished to profusion with velvets, embroidery, and tapestry: but there are no pictures worth looking at; and yet there is the affectation of a large collection. Some indifferent hand has produced a great variety of copies from Rembrant, Guido, and other masters; but they are of little value. Here also are several of Panini's crowded ruins; and in the hall, and eating-parlour, many histories by Cassali. Coriolanus is a tolerable picture: but, in general, they consist of bad figures, injudicious grouping, and gawdy colouring. In the ball-room is a good *Portia* by Skalken.

It is not easy to avoid such an opportunity of remarking the absurdity of adorning a noble house with tawdry pictures. The genuine works of capital masters, however indifferent, have a kind of classical authority stamped upon them; and if they displease one connoisseur, may

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please another. Parts in all of them we may admire; and if there is nothing else to please, we may be amused with examining the mode of execution in each. Pictures also, by inferior masters, are often excellent; and may adorn a great house with propriety. We should wish them however to be original. But paltry painting, whether original or copied, like paltry poetry, is disgusting. Horace's rule is admirable in *all matters of taste*.

Ut gratas inter mentas symphonia discors,
 Et crassum unguentum, & Sardo cum melle papaver
 Offendunt; poterat duci quia cœna sine ipsis:
 Sic animis natum, inventumque poema juvandis,
 Si paulum fummo discessit, vergit ad imum.

There are some things (as I should translate this passage) which are absolutely necessary; and which therefore we *must* have; and there are other things which are merely ornamental; and which we *need not* have. In the former, we dispense with perfection: but in the latter, we must either have perfection or something very like it: because the end of ornament is to *please*; and if it fail in this, it does nothing. A man *must* have a dinner, for instance, and tho' homely, his appetite gives it a relish. But when a man proceeds to treat his company at dinner with

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with a band of mufick, unless it be good, he had better omit it. Thus a man *must* have a house; and tho his house be not in elegant taste; yet still it is a valuable accommodation. But if he proceed to ornament his house; unless his ornaments are elegant, his house is better without them;

— poterat duci quia cœna sine ipsis.

We may add, that paltry copies from great masters take from the dignity of a noble mansion. If the ancestry of such a house had been many years in the possession of it, it may be supposed they might have collected a few original pictures. If nothing of that kind is found in it, the possessors of the house may be supposed to be an upstart race.

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S E C T. II.

FROM Lord Tilney's we proceeded, through the forest, to Woodford ; in the neighbourhood of which are some pleasant views on the right. Ranges of villages succeed : but no idea of forest-scenery. Here and there are little patches of common, circled with wood ; and a variety of villas, shewing more the opulence, than the taste of their owners. Sometimes the half-formed idea of a forest-scene breaks out : but the trees are seldom massed — often only solitary pollards.

At the *Bald-faced stag*, about the tenth stone, a descending plain, marked with many wheel-tracks, and closed with a woody scene, opens agreeably. A nother scene of the same kind rises

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about the thirteenth stone. Both these views afford a painter a good opportunity of studying the beauties of a winding road ; forming an easy serpentine line, and diminishing in perspective along a slip of wooded common. In other places, you see it sinking into a dip of the forest ; beyond which it appears winding among boles of trees, till it is lost in a thicket ; and is discovered again, perhaps at a considerable distance, entering a village in a direction, contrary to that, in which it entered the wood.

About Epping the soil is a deep clay ; the country much inclosed, and the meadows covered with a great luxuriance of natural herbage.

The road from Harlow to Chesterford affords nothing striking. It is generally inclosed ; sometimes between high banks ; and seldom opens into the country.

Lord Thomond's improvements, I should suppose, deserve notice. We had time only to
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give them a glance. The rivers and it's banks seemed more natural, than such modes of improvement commonly are; and the scenery, on the whole, has an agreeable air.

Audley-end, or Audley-inn, as it was formerly called, about two miles farther, was built by the Lord treasurer Audley in James the first's time; and was perhaps the most magnificent private house, that ever was erected in England. One of king James's foolish speeches is handed down on this occasion. It was suitable, he said, to a lord treasurer; but too large for a king. If James meant any thing by this expression, it was that his treasurer had grown rich too suddenly. He should either therefore have corrected the abuse; or not have avowed the opinion. The architect of this magnificent palace was Bernard Janfen; whose original plan, tho now much dismembered, was supposed at that day, to be a work of as much taste, as grandeur. A gallery, ninety-five yards in length has been taken down, together with a chappel, and some other spacious apartments, which completed the back-front, and made at least a fourth part of the whole building. Sir John Vanbrugh was

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was afterwards employed in forming the remainder into a whole ; in which he was thought to have shewn but little judgment. — Audley-end however, tho the improved grounds around it did not appear to us very interesting, is still among the places pointed out, as worth seeing on this road.

The country beyond Audley-end grows chalky, bare, exposed, ridgy, and unpleasent ; and, after we leave Chesterford, it becomes flat also. The distances, such as they are (no where furnished with variety of objects, nor ever remote) are terminated with one even line of horizon : and the foregrounds are spongy swamps, producing only rushes, the natural appendages of a fenny country. Gog-magog-hills, which we leave on the right, so little deserve the name of *hills*, that we should not have observed them, unless they had been pointed out to us.

Cambridge makes no appearance at a distance. King's-college chappel, is the only object, which presents itself with any dignity, as we approach.

At the end of Queen's walk, Clare-hall makes a good *perspective*. When you see it
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