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978-1-108-08485-7 - Remarks on Forest Scenery, and Other Woodland Views: Illustrated by the
Scenes of New-Forest in Hampshire: Volume 1

William Gilpin

Excerpt

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OBSERVATIONS
ON
FOREST SCENERY.

B O O K I.

S E C T I O N I.

IT is no exaggerated praise to call a tree the *grandest*, and most *beautiful* of all the productions of the earth. In the former of these epithets nothing contends with it; for we consider rocks and mountains, as part of the earth itself. And tho' among inferior plants, shrubs, and flowers, there is great beauty; yet when we consider, that these minuter productions are chiefly beautiful as *individuals*; and are not adapted to form the arrangement of *composition in landscape*; nor to receive the *effects of light and shade*; they must give place in point of *beauty*—of *picturesque beauty* at least, which we are here considering—to the form and foliage, and ramification of the tree.

VOL. I.

B

Thus

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Thus the splendid tints of the insect, however beautiful, must yield to the elegance, and proportion of animals, which range in a higher class.

With animal life, I should not set the tree in competition. The shape, the different-coloured fur, the varied, and spirited attitudes, the character, and motion, which strike us in the animal creation, are certainly beyond still-life in its most pleasing appearance. I should only observe with regard to trees, that nature has been kinder to them in point of *variety*, than even to its *living forms*. Tho every animal is distinguished from its fellow, by some little variation of colour, character, or shape; yet in all the *larger parts*, in the body and limbs, the resemblance is generally exact. In trees, it is just the reverse: the *smaller parts*, the spray, the leaves, the blossom, and the seed, are the same in all trees of the same kind: while the larger parts, from which the *most beautiful varieties* result, are wholly different. You never see two oaks with an equal number of limbs, the same kind of head, and twisted in the same form.— However, as *variety* is not alone sufficient to give superiority to the tree; we give the preference on the whole, to animal life.

SECT.

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S E C T. II.

TREES when young, like striplings, shoot into taper forms. There is a lightness, and an airiness in them, which is pleasing; but they do not spread and receive their just proportions, till they have attained their full growth.

There is as much difference too in trees, I mean in trees of the same kind, in point of beauty, as there is in human figures. The limbs of some are set on awkwardly; their trunks are disproportioned; and their whole form is unpleasing. The same rules, which establish elegance in other objects, establish it in these. There must be the same harmony of parts; the same sweeping line; the same contrast, the same ease and freedom. A bough indeed may issue from the trunk at right-angles, and yet elegantly, as it frequently does in the oak; but it must immediately form some

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contrasting

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contrasting sweep, or the junction will be awkward.

All forms, that are *unnatural*, displease. A tree lopped into a may-pole, as you generally see in the hedge-rows of Surry, and some other countries, is disgusting. Clipped yews, lime hedges, and pollards are, for the same reason disagreeable: and yet I have sometimes seen a pollard produce a good effect, when nature has been suffered, for some years, to bring it again into form: but I never saw a good effect produced by a pollard, on which some single stem was left to grow into a tree. The stem is of a different growth: it is disproportioned; and always unites awkwardly with the trunk.

Not only all forms, that are unnatural, displease; but even natural forms, when they bear a resemblance to art, unless indeed these forms are characteristic of the species. A cypress pleases in a conic form; but an oak, or an elm trimmed into that appearance, would disgust. In the cypress nature adapts the spray, and branches to the form of the tree. In the oak and elm the spray, and branches form a different character.

Lightness

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Lightness also is a characteristic of beauty in a tree: for tho there are beautiful trees of a heavy, as well as of a light form; yet their extremities must in some parts be separated, and hang with a degree of looseness from the fulness of the foliage, which occupies the middle of the tree, or the whole will only be a large bush. From position indeed, and contrast, heaviness, tho in itself a deformity, may be of singular use in the composition both of natural, and of artificial landscape.

A tree also must be *well-balanced* to be beautiful. It may have form, and it may have lightness; and yet lose all its effect, by wanting a proper poise. The bole must appear to support the branches. We do not desire to see it supporting it's burden with the perpendicular firmness of a column. An easy sweep is always agreeable: but at the same time it should not be such a sweep, as discovers one side plainly overbalanced.

On bleak sea-coasts, trees generally take an unbalanced form: and indeed in general, some

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foreign

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foreign cause must operate to occasion it; for nature working freely, is as much inclined to balance a tree upon it's trunk, as an animal upon it's legs.

And yet in some circumstances, I have seen beauty arise even from an unbalanced tree; but it must arise from some peculiar situation, which gives it a local propriety. A tree, for instance, hanging from a rock, tho' totally unpoised, may be beautiful: or it may have a good effect, when we see it bending over a road; because it corresponds with it's peculiar situation. We do not, in these cases, admire it as a tree; but as the adjunct of an effect; the beauty of which does not give the eye leisure to attend to the deformity of the instrument, through which the effect is produced.

Without these requisites therefore, *form*, *lightness*, and a *proper balance*, no tree can have that *species of beauty*, which we call *picturesque*.

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