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Observations on the theory and practice of landscape gardening

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Chapter III.

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CHAPTER III.

Water— it may be too naked or too much clothed — Example from WEST WYCOMBE — Digression concerning the Approach — Motion of Water — Example at ADLESTROP — Art must deceive to imitate Nature — Cascade at THORESBY — The Rivulet — Water at WENTWORTH described — A River easier to imitate than a Lake — A bubbling Spring may be imitated — a Ferry Boat at HOLKHAM — A rocky Channel at HAREWOOD.

THE observations in the preceding chapter concerning the reflection of sky on the surface of water, will account for that brilliant and cheerful effect produced by a small pool, frequently placed near a house, although in direct violation of nature: for since the ground ought to slope, and generally does slope from a house, the water very near it must be on the side of a hill, and of course artificial. Although I have never proposed a piece of water to be made in such a situation, I have frequently advised that small pools so unnaturally placed should be retained, in compliance with that general satisfaction which the eye derives from the glitter of water, however absurd its situation.

It requires a degree of refinement in taste bordering on fastidiousness, to remove what is cheerful and pleasing to the eye, merely because it cannot be accounted for by the common laws of nature; I was, however, not sorry to discover some plea for my compliance, by considering, that although water on a hill

is generally deemed unnatural, yet all rivers derive their sources from hills, and the highest mountains are known to have lakes or pools of water near their summits.

We object, therefore, not so much to the actual situation, as to the artificial management of such water. We long to break down the mound of earth by which the water is confined; although we might afterwards regret the loss of its cheerful glitter; and hence, perhaps, arises that baldness in artificial pools, so disgusting to the painter, and yet so pleasing to the less accurate observer. The latter delights in a broad expanse of light on the smooth surface, reflecting a brilliant sky; the former expects to find that surface ruffled by the winds, or the glare of light in parts obscured by the reflection of trees from the banks of the water; and thus while the painter requires a *picture*, the less scientific observer will be satisfied with a *mirror*.

During great part of last century WEST WYCOMBE was deemed a garden of such finished beauty, that to those who formerly remembered the place, it will seem absurd to suggest any improvement. But time will equally extend its changing influence to the works of nature and to those of art, since the PLANTER has to contend with a power—

“ A hidden power! at once his friend and foe!
 'Tis VEGETATION! Gradual to his groves
 She gives their wished effects, and that displayed,
 O! that her power would pause! but active still,
 She swells each stem, prolongs each vagrant bough,
 And darts, with unremitting vigour bold,
 From grace to wild luxuriance”—

MASON.

Thus at WEST WYCOMBE, those trees and shrubs which were once its greatest ornament, have now so far outgrown their situation, that the whole character of the place is altered; and instead of that gaiety and cheerfulness inspired by flowering shrubs and young trees, gloom and melancholy seem to have reared their standard in the branches of the tallest elms, and to shed their influence on every surrounding object: on the House, by lessening its importance; on the Water, by darkening its surface; and on the Lawn, by lengthened shadows.

The prodigious height of the trees near the house has not merely affected the character, but also the very situation of the house. Instead of appearing to stand on a dry bank, considerably above the water (as it actually does) the house, oppressed by the neighbouring trees, became damp, and appeared to have been placed in a gloomy bottom, while the water was hardly visible, from the dark reflection of the trees on its surface, and the views of the distant hills were totally concealed from the house.

It is a fortunate circumstance for the possessor where improvement can be made rather by cutting down than by planting trees. The effect is instantly produced, and as the change in the scenery at this place has actually been realized before I could make a sketch to explain its necessity, the following drawing serves to record my reason for so boldly advising the use of the axe. I am well aware that my advice may subject me to the criticism of some, who will regret the loss of old trees, which, like old acquaintances, excite a degree of veneration, even when their age and infirmity have rendered them useless, perhaps offensive, to all but their youthful associates.

The tedious process of planting and rearing woods, and the dreadful havock too often made by injudiciously falling large trees, ought certainly to inspire caution and diffidence; but there is in reality no more temerity in marking the trees to be taken down than those to be planted, and I trust there has not been a single tree displaced at WEST WYCOMBE, which has not tended to improve the healthfulness, the magnificence, and the beauty of the place.

Most of the principal rooms having a north aspect, the landscape requires peculiar management not generally understood¹. Lawn, wood, and water, are always seen to the greatest advantage with the sun behind them, because the full glare of light between opposite trees destroys the contrast of wood and lawn; while water never looks so brilliant and cheerful when reflecting the northern, as the southern sky: a view therefore to the north would be dull and uninteresting without some artificial objects, such as boats or buildings, or distant corn fields, to receive the opposite beams of the sun.

A sketch (in the *Red Book*)^m shewed the effect of taking down trees to admit the distant woods, and by removing those on the island, and of course their reflection, the water becomes more conspicuous; in addition to this, the proposed new road of approach, with carriages occasionally passing near the banks of the lake, will give animation to the view from the saloon.

¹ This subject has been explained in the preceding Chapter.

^m A view of the house across the water, not here inserted, being exactly the reverse of that which represents the view towards the house, which is inserted.

The view of WEST WYCOMBE, inserted in this work, being taken from the proposed approach, I shall here beg leave to make a short digression, explaining my reasons for that line, founded on some general principles respecting an approach, although it has no other reference to the water than as it justifies its course in passing the house to arrive at its object.

If the display of magnificent or of picturesque scenery in a park be made without ostentation, it can be no more at variance with good taste than the display of superior affluence in the houses, the equipage, the furniture, or the habiliment of wealthy individuals. It will, therefore, I trust, sufficiently justify the line of approach here proposed, to say, that it passes through the most interesting part of the grounds, and will display the scenery of the place to the greatest advantage, without making any violent or unnecessary circuit, to include objects that do not naturally come within its reach. This I deem to be a just and sufficient motive, and an allowable display of property without ostentation.

The former approach to the house was on the south side of the valley, and objectionable for two reasons; 1st, it ascended the hill, and after passing round the whole of the buildings, it descended to the house, making it appear to stand low: 2nd, by going along the side of the hill, little of the park was shewn, although the road actually passed through it; because, on an inclined plane,^a the ground which either rises on one side or falls on the other, becomes fore-shortened and little observed, while the eye is directed to the opposite side of the

^a This is explained in Chap. II.



WEST WYCOMBE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.



ESHIRE.

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valley, which, in this instance, consisted of enclosures beyond the park. On the contrary, the proposed new approach, being on the north side of the valley, will shew the park on the opposite bank to advantage, and, by ascending to the house, it will appear in its true and desirable situation upon a sufficient eminence above the water; yet backed by still higher ground, richly clothed with wood, this view of the house will also serve to explain, and I hope to justify, the sacrifice of those large trees which have been ° cut down upon the island, and whose dark shadows being reflected on the water, excluded all cheerfulness.

The water at WEST WYCOMBE, from the brilliancy of its colour, the variety of its shores, the different courses of its channel, and the number of its wooded islands, possessed a degree of pleasing intricacy which I have rarely seen in artificial pools or rivers; there appears to be only one improvement necessary to give it all the variety of which it is capable. The glassy surface of a still calm lake, however delightful, is not more interesting than the lively brook rippling over a rocky bed; but when the latter is compared with a narrow stagnant creek, it must have a decided preference; and as this advantage might

° Mr. Brown has been accused of cutting down large old trees, and afterwards planting small ones on the same spot; the annexed plate may serve to vindicate the propriety of his advice.

easily be obtained in view of the house, I think it ought not to be neglected.

It may perhaps be objected, that to introduce rock scenery in this place would be unnatural; but if this artifice be properly executed, no eye can discover the illusion; and it is only by such deceptions that art can imitate the most pleasing works of nature. By the help of such illusion we may see the interesting struggles of the babbling brook, which soon after

————— “spreads
 Into a liquid plain, then stands unmov'd
 Pure as the expanse of Heaven.”

This idea has been realized in the scenery at ADLESTROP, where a small pool, very near the house, was supplied by a copious spring of clear water. The cheerful glitter of this little mirror, although on the top of the hill, gave pleasure to those who had never considered how much it lessened the place, by attracting the eye and preventing its range over the lawn and falling ground beyond. This pool has now been removed; a lively stream of water has been led through a flower garden, where its progress down the hill is occasionally obstructed by ledges of rock, and after a variety of interesting circumstances it falls into a lake at a considerable distance, but in full view both of the mansion and the parsonage, to each of which it makes a delightful, because a natural, feature in the landscape.

Few persons have seen the formal cascade at THORESBY in front of the house, and heard its solemn roar, without wishing to retain a feature which would be one of the most interesting scenes in nature, if it could be divested of its disgusting and

artificial formality; but this can only be effected by an equally violent, though less apparent, interference of art; because without absolutely copying any particular scene in Nature, we must endeavour to imitate the causes by which she produces her effects, and the effects will be natural.

The general cause of a natural lake, or expanse of water, is an obstruction to the current of a stream by some ledge or stratum of rock which it cannot penetrate; but as soon as the water has risen to the surface of this rock, it tumbles over with great fury, wearing itself a channel among the craggy fragments, and generally forming an ample bason at its foot. Such is the scenery we must attempt to imitate at THORESBY.^p

Having condemned the ill-judged interference of art in the disposition of the ground and water at THORESBY, it may perhaps be objected that I now recommend an artificial management not less extravagant; because I presume to introduce some appearance of rock scenery in a soil where no rock naturally exists; but the same objection might be made with equal propriety to the introduction of an artificial lake in a scene where no lake before existed. When under the guidance of Le Nôtre and his disciples, the taste for geometric gardening prevailed, nature was totally banished or concealed by the works of art.

^p No drawing is inserted of this cascade, because the whole has been so well executed, that the best reference is to the spot itself, which will, I trust, long continue to prove my art "above the pencil's power to imitate."

In forming this cascade huge masses of rock were brought from the craigs of Creswell, one in particular of many tons weight, with a large tree growing in its fissures; the water has been so conducted by concealed leaden pipes, that in some places it appears to have forced its way through the ledges of the rocks.

Now in defining the shape of land or water, we take nature for our model; and the highest perfection of landscape gardening is, to imitate nature so judiciously, that the interference of art shall never be detected.

L'Arte che tutto fa nulla se scopre.

A rapid stream, violently agitated, is one of the most interesting objects in nature. Yet this can seldom be enjoyed except in a rocky country; since the more impetuous the stream, the sooner will it be buried within its banks, unless they are of such materials as can resist its fury. To imitate this natural effect, therefore, in a soil like that of THORESBY, we must either force the stream above its level and deprive it of natural motion, or introduce a foundation of stones disposed in such a manner as to appear the rocky channel of the mountain stream. The former has been already done in forming the lake, and the latter has been attempted according to the fashion of geometric gardening in the regular cascade; where a great body of water was led under ground from the lake to move down stairs, into a scolloped bason, between two bridges immediately in front of the house.

The violence done to nature by the introduction of rock scenery at THORESBY is the more allowable, since it is within a short distance of Derbyshire, the most romantic county in England; while from the awful and picturesque scenery of Creswell Craigs such strata and ledges of stone, covered with their natural vegetation, may be transported thither, that no eye can discover the fraud.

It is scarcely possible for any admirer of nature to be more

enthusiastically fond of her romantic scenery than myself; but her wildest features are seldom within the common range of man's habitation. The rugged paths of alpine regions will not be *daily* trodden by the foot of affluence, nor will the thundering cataracts of Niagara seduce the votaries of pleasure *frequently* to visit their wonders; it is only by a pleasing illusion that we can avail ourselves of those means which nature herself furnishes even in tame scenery to imitate her bolder effects; and to this illusion, if well conducted, the eye of genuine taste will not refuse its assent.

“ La nature fuit les lieux fréquentés, c'est au sommet des montagnes, au fond des forêts, dans les isles desertes, qu'elle étale ses charmes les plus touchants, ceux qui l'aiment et ne peuvent l'aller chercher si loin, sont réduits à lui faire violence, et à la forcer en quelque sorte à venir habiter parmi eux, et tout cela ne peut se faire sans un peu d'illusion.”—J. J. ROUSSEAU.

One of the views from the house at THORESBY looked towards

————— “ the long line
 Deep delv'd of flat canal, and all that toil
 Misled by tasteless fashion could atchieve
 To mar fair nature's lineaments divine.” MASON.

As in this instance I shall have occasion to propose a different idea to that suggested by Mr. Brown, I must beg leave to explain the reasons on which I ground my opinion.

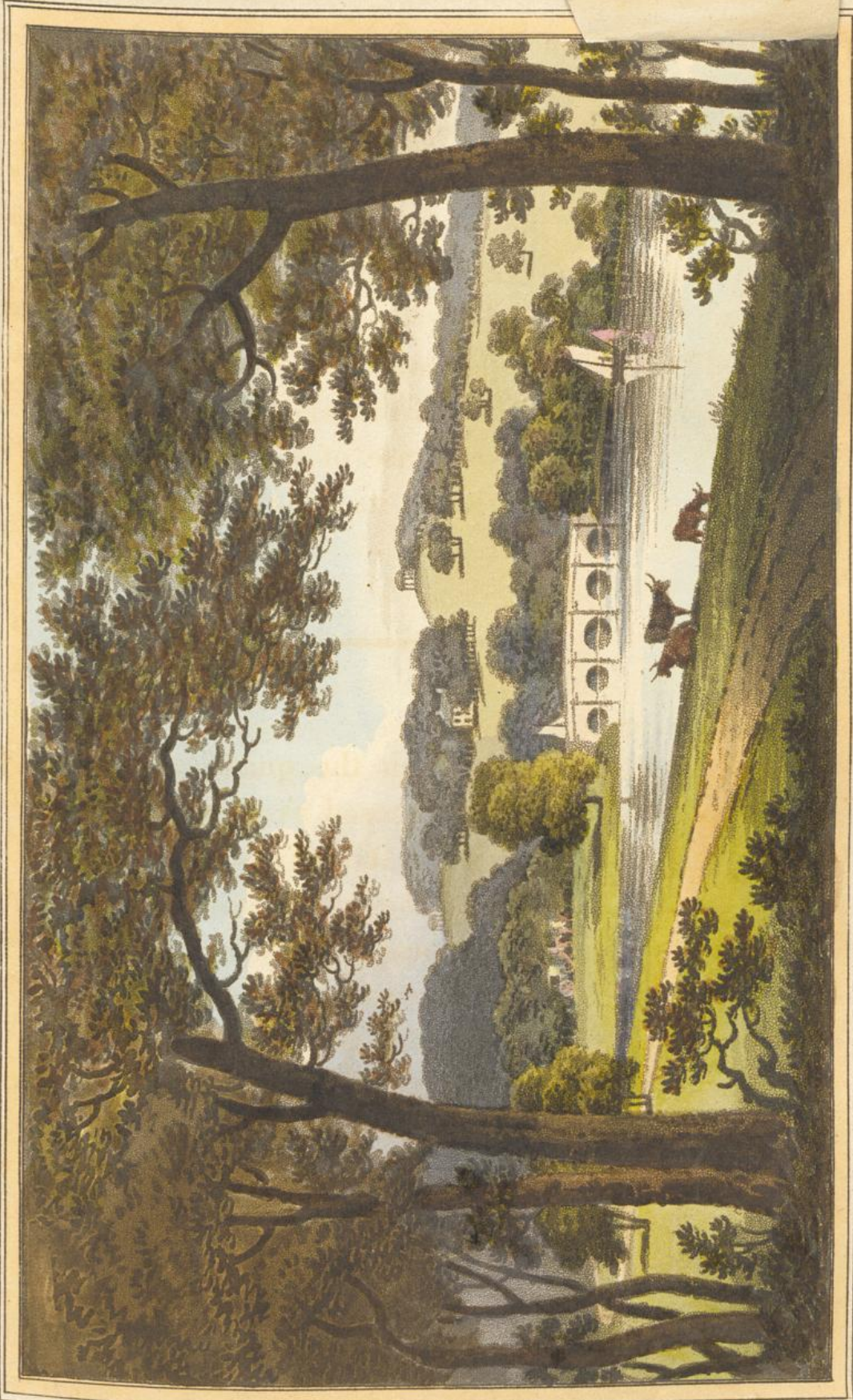
Amidst the numerous proofs of taste and judgment which that celebrated landscape gardener has left for our admiration, he frequently mistook the character of running water; he was too apt to check its progress by converting a lively river into a stagnant pool, nay, he even dared to check the progress of the furious Derwent at Chatsworth, and transform it into a tame and sleepy river unworthy the majesty of that palace of the mountains. Such was his intention with respect to the stream of water which flows through THORESBY park; but since the lake presents a magnificent expanse of water, the river below the cascade should be restored to its natural character: *a rivulet in motion.*

At WENTWORTH, although the quantity of water is very considerable, yet it is so disposed as to be little seen from the present approach, and when it is crossed in the drive on the head between two pools, the artificial management destroys much of its effect: they appear to be several distinct ponds, and not the series of lakes which nature produces in a mountainous country. But the character of this water should rather imitate one large river than several small lakes; especially as it is much easier to produce the appearance of continuity, than of such vast expanse as a lake requires. The following sketch is a view of the scenery presenting itself under the branches of trees, which act as a frame to the landscape.

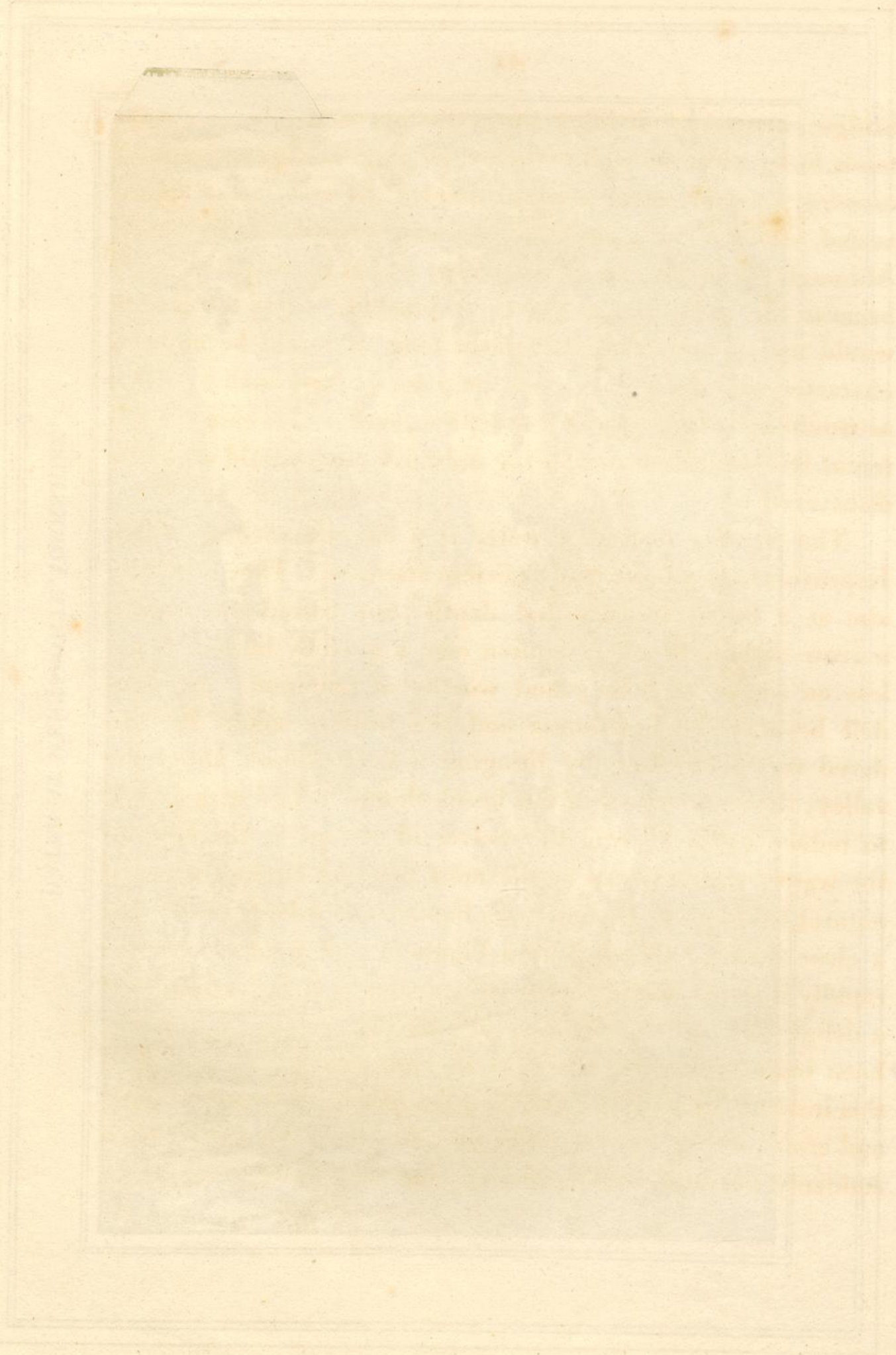
To preserve the idea of a river nothing is so effectual as a



WATER AT WENTWORTH, YORKSHIRE.



WATER AT WENTWORTH, YORKSHIRE.



bridge; instead of dividing the water on each side, it always tends to lengthen its continuity by shewing the impossibility of crossing it by any other means, provided the ends are well concealed, which is fortunately the case with respect to this water. Although the upper side of the bridge would be very little seen because the banks are every where planted; yet as the bridge would not be more than fifty yards long, it would be more in character with the greatness of the place to have such a bridge as would no where appear a deception, and in this case the different levels of the water (being only five feet) would never be discovered.

The *rippling motion* of water is a circumstance to which Improvers have seldom paid sufficient attention. They generally aim at a broad expanse and depth, not considering that a narrow shallow brook in motion over a gravelly bottom is not less an object of beauty and worthy of imitation; the deep dell betwixt the boat-house and the bridge, might be rendered very interesting by bringing a lively brook along the valley; the embouchure of this brook should be laid with gravel, to induce cattle to form themselves in groups at the edge of the water, which is one of the most pleasing circumstances of natural landscape. It sometimes happens near large rivers that a clear spring bubbles from a fountain, and pours its waters rapidly into the neighbouring stream; this is always considered a delightful object in nature, yet I do not recollect it has ever been imitated by art; it would be very easy to produce it in this instance by leading water in a channel from the upper pool, and after passing under ground by tubes for a few yards, let it suddenly burst through a bed of sand and stones, and being

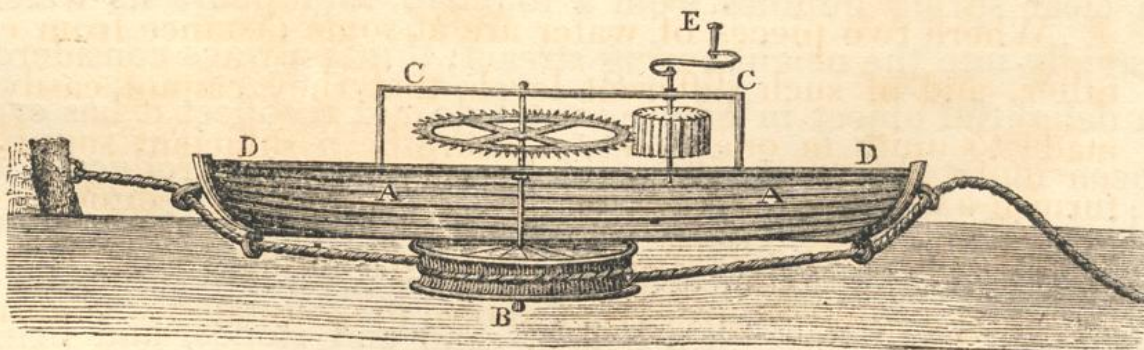
thus *filtered by ascent*, it would ripple along the valley till it joined the great water. Milton was aware of this contrast between the river and the rill, where he mentions amongst the scenery of his Allegro,

“ Shallow brooks and rivers wide.”

As applicable to the subject of this chapter, I shall insert the following extract from the *Red Book* of HOLKHAM.

“ The opposite banks in the middle part of the lake being the most beautiful ground in HOLKHAM park, it is a desirable object to unite them without the long circuit which must be made by land round either end of the lake.

A bridge, however elegant for the sake of magnificence, or however simple for the sake of convenience, would be improper; because it would destroy the effect of the lake, and give it the character of a river, which its round and abrupt terminations render improbable. I therefore propose to unite these opposite shores by a ferry-boat of a novel construction, so contrived as to be navigated with the greatest safety and ease, as explained by the following sketch.



EXPLANATION.

The ferry-boat to be a broad flat-bottomed punt A. at the bottom is a pulley-shaped wheel and axis B. about a yard in diameter, carrying a rope fastened to the two opposite sides of the lake, which will sink to admit the passing of other boats; this wheel is put in motion by the correspondent one above it, which has five times as many teeth as the pinion C. consequently at every five turns of the winch E. the wheel makes one revolution, and the boat advances three yards, or three times the diameter of the wheel; at each end of the boat the rope must pass through rings of brass smoothly polished, which will always guide it to one certain spot. The whole machinery, which is very simple, and not likely to be out of order, may be covered by a box C. C. to form a convenient seat in the centre of the ferry-boat, and the surface or deck of this boat D. may be covered with gravel and cement, having a hand-rail on each side; thus it will in a manner become a moveable part of the gravel walk."

Where two pieces of water are at some distance from each other, and of such different levels that they cannot easily be made to unite in one sheet: if there be a sufficient supply to furnish a continual stream, or only an occasional redundance in winter, the most picturesque mode of uniting the two, is by imitating a common process of nature in mountainous countries,

where we often see the water in its progress from one lake to another, dashing among broken fragments, or gently gliding over ledges of rock, which form the bottom of the channel: this may be accomplished at HAREWOOD, where the most beautiful stone is easily procured; but in disposing the ledges of rock, they should not be laid horizontally, but with the same slanting inclination that is observed more or less in the bed of the neighbouring river. A hint of such management is shewn under this bridge, the design of which may serve as a specimen of architecture, neither too much nor too little ornamented for rock scenery, in the neighbourhood of a palace.

