

Brownian Landscapes

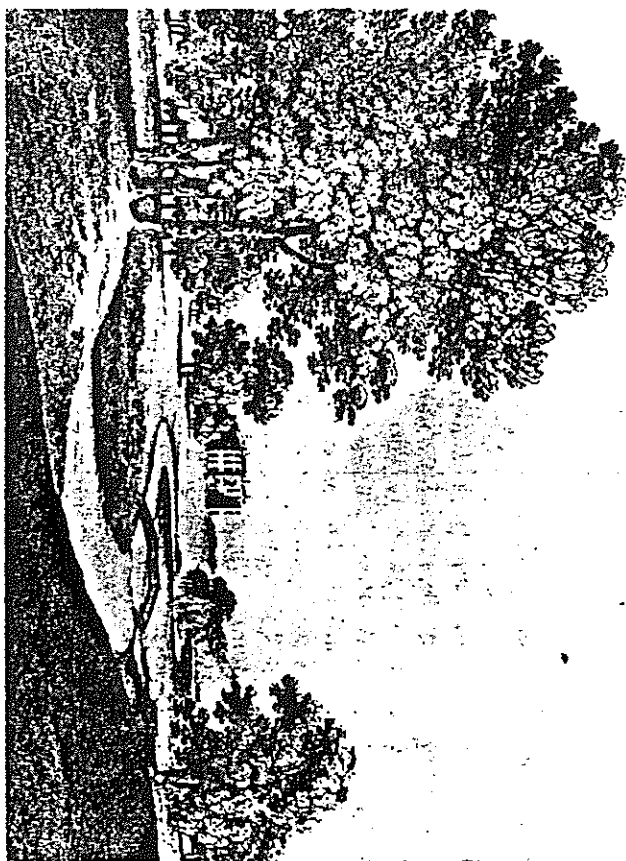


Fig. 7 Benjamin Pouncey after Thomas Hearne, contrasting plates from Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape: A Didactic Poem* (1794).

PART II.

*Uvedale Price, from Essays
on the Picturesque*

HAVING now examined the chief qualities that in such various ways render objects interesting; having shewn how much the beauty, spirit, and effect of landscape, real or imitated, depend upon a just degree of variety and intricacy, on a due mixture of rough and smooth in the surface, and of warm and cool in the tints; having shewn too, that the general principles of improving are in reality the same as those of painting—I shall next inquire how far the principles of the last-mentioned art (clearly the best qualified to improve and refine our ideas of nature) have been attended to by improvers: how far also

those who first produced, and those who have continued the present system were capable of applying them, even if they had been convinced of their importance.

It appears from Mr. Walpole's very ingenious and entertaining treatise on modern gardening, that Kent was the first who introduced that so much admired change from the old to the present system; the great leading feature of which change, and the leading character of each style, are very aptly expressed in half a line of Horace:

Mutat quadrata rotundis,

Formerly, every thing was in squares and parallelograms; now every thing is in segments of circles, and ellipses: the formality still remains; the character of that formality alone is changed. The old canal, for instance, has lost, indeed, its straitness and its angles; but it is become regularly serpentine, and the edges remain as naked and as uniform as before: avenues, vistas,

and strait ridings through woods, are exchanged, for clumps, belts, and circular roads and plantations of every kind: strait alleys in gardens, and the platform of the old terrace, for the curves of the gravel walk. The intention of the new improvers was certainly meritorious; for they meant to banish formality, and to restore nature; but it must be remembered, that strongly marked, distinct, and regular curves, unbroken and undisguised, are hardly less unnatural or formal, though much less grand and simple, than strait lines; and that independently of monotony, the continual and indiscriminate use of such curves, has an appearance of affectation and of studied grace, which always creates disgust.

The old style had indisputably defects and absurdities of the most obvious and striking kind. Kent, therefore, is entitled to the same praise as other reformers, who have broken through narrow, inveterate, long established prejudices; and who, thereby, have prepared the way for more liberal notions, although, by their own prac-

tice and example, they may have substituted other narrow prejudices and absurdities, in the room of those which they proscribed. It must be owned at the same time, that like other reformers, he and his followers demolished without distinction, the costly and magnificent decorations of past times, and all that had long been held in veneration: and among them many things, which still deserved to have been respected and adopted. Such, however is the zeal and enthusiasm with which at the early period of their success, novelties of every kind are received, that the fascination becomes general; and the few who may then see their defects, hardly dare to attack openly, what a multitude is in arms to defend. It is reserved for those, who are further removed from that moment of sudden change, and strong prejudice, to examine the merits and defects of both styles. But how are they to be examined? by those general and unchanging principles, which best enable us to form our judgment of the effect of all visible objects, but which, for

the reasons I before have mentioned, are very commonly called the principles of painting*. These *general* principles, not those peculiar to the *practice* of the art, are, in my idea, universally applicable to every kind of ornamental gardening, in the most confined, as well as the most enlarged sense of the word: my business at present is almost entirely with the latter, with what may be termed the landscapes and the general scenery of the place, whether under the title of grounds, lawn, park, or any other denomination.

With respect to Kent, and his particular mode of improving, I can say but little from my own knowledge, having never seen any works of his that I could be sure had undergone no alteration from any of his successors; but Mr. Walpole, by a few characteristic anecdotes, has made us perfectly acquainted with the turn of his mind, and the extent of his genius.

A *painter*, who, from being used to *plant* young beeches, introduced them almost

* Page 15.

exclusively into his *landscapes*, and who even in his designs for Spencer, whose scenes were so often laid,

infra l'ombrose piante
D'antica selva,

still kept to his little beeches, must have had a more paltry mind than falls to the common lot: it must also have been as perverse as it was paltry; for as he *ainted* trees without form, so he *planted* them without life, and seems to have imagined that circumstance alone would compensate for want of bulk, of age, and of grandeur of character.

I may here observe, that it is almost impossible to remove a large old tree, with all its branches, spurs, and appendages; and without such qualities as greatness of size, joined to an air of grandeur and of high antiquity, a dead tree should seldom if ever be *left*, especially in a conspicuous place; to entitle it to such a station, it should be "majestic even in ruin:" a dead tree which could be moved, would, from that very circumstance, be unfit for moving. Those of Kent's, were probably placed

where they would attract the eye; for it is rare that any improver wishes to conceal his efforts.

If I have spoken thus strongly of a man, who has been celebrated in prose and in verse as the founder of an art almost peculiar to this country, and from which it is supposed to derive no slight degree of glory, I have done it to prevent (as far as it lies in me) the bad effect which too great a veneration for first reformers is sure to produce—that of interesting national vanity, in the continuance and protection of their errors. The task which I have taken upon myself, has been in all ages invidious and unpopular: with regard to Kent, however, I thought it particularly incumbent upon me to shew that he was not one of those great original geniuses, who, like Michael Angelo, seem born to give the world more enlarged and exalted ideas of art; but, on the contrary, that in the art he did profess, and from which he might be supposed to have derived superior lights with respect to that of gardening, his ideas were uncommonly mean, contracted, and perverse. Were I not to

shew this plainly and strongly, and without any affected candour or reserve, it might be said to me with great reason—you assert that a knowledge of the principles of painting is the first qualification for an improver; the founder of English gardening was a professed artist, and yet you object to him!

Kent, it is true, was by profession a painter, as well as an improver; but we may learn from his example, how little a certain degree of mechanical practice will qualify its possessor, to direct the taste of a nation in either of those arts.

The most enlightened judge, both of his own art, and of all that relates to it, is a painter of a liberal and comprehensive mind, who has added extensive observation and reflection, to practical execution; and if in addition to those natural and acquired talents, he likewise possess the power of expressing his ideas clearly and forcibly in words, the most capable of enlightening others: to such a rare combination we owe Sir Joshua Reynolds's dis-

courses, the most original and impressive work that ever was published on his, or possibly on any art. On the other hand, nothing so contracts the mind, as a little practical dexterity, unassisted and uncorrected by general knowledge and observation, and by a study of the great masters. An artist, whose mind has been so contracted, refers every thing to the narrow circle of his own ideas and execution, and wishes to confine within that circle all the rest of mankind*.

Before I enter into any particulars, I will make a few observations on what I look upon as the great general defect of the present system; not as opposed to the old style, which I believe, however, to have been infinitely more free from it, but con-

* I remember a gentleman who played very prettily on the flute, abusing all Handel's music; and to give me every advantage, like a generous adversary, he defied me to name one good chorus of his writing. It may well be supposed that I did not accept the challenge; *c'étoit bien l'embarras des richesses*: and indeed he was right in his own way of considering them, for there is not one that would do well for his instrument.

sidered by itself singly, and without comparison. That defect, the greatest of all, and the most opposite to the principles of painting, is want of connection—a passion for making every thing distinct and separate. All the particular defects which I shall have occasion to notice, in some degree arise from, and tend towards this original sin.

Whoever has examined with attention the landscapes of eminent painters, must have observed how much art and study they have employed, in contriving that all the objects should have a mutual relation; that nothing should be detached in such a manner as to appear totally insulated and unconnected, but that there should be a sort of continuity throughout the whole. He must have remarked how much is effected, where the style of scenery admits of it, by their judicious use of every kind of vegetation, from the loftiest trees through all their different growths, down to the lowest plants; so that nothing should be crowded, nothing bare; no heavy uniform

masses, no meagre and frittered patches. As materials for landscape, they noticed, and often sketched, wherever they met with them, the happiest groups, whether of trees standing alone, or mixed with thickets and underwood; observing the manner in which they accorded with and displayed the character of the ground, and produced intricacy, variety, and connection. All that has just been mentioned, is as much an object of study to the improver, as to the painter: the former, indeed, though in some parts he may preserve the appearance of wildness and of neglect, in others must soften it, and in others again exchange it for the highest degree of neatness: but there is no part where a connection between the different objects is not required, or where a just degree of intricacy and enrichment would interfere with neatness. Every professor, from Kent nearly down to the present time, has proceeded on directly opposite principles: the first impression received from a place where one of them has been employed, is that of general bareness, and

particular heaviness and distinctness; indeed their dislike or neglect of enrichment, variety, intricacy, and above all of connection, is apparent throughout. Water, for instance, particularly requires enrichment; they make it totally naked: the boundaries in the same degree require variety and intricacy; they make them almost regularly circular: and lastly, as it calls for all the improver's art to give connection to the trees in the open parts, they make them completely insulated. One of their first operations is to clear away the humbler trees, those bonds of connection which the painter admires, and which the judicious improver always touches with a cautious hand; for however minute and trifling the small connecting ties and bonds of scenery may appear, they are those by which the more considerable objects in all their different arrangements are combined, and on which their balance, their contrast, and diversity, as well as union depends*.

* It would be hardly less absurd to throw out all the connecting particles in language, as unworthy of being

Water, when accompanied by trees and bushes variously arranged, is often so imperceptibly united with land, that in many places the eye cannot discover the perfect spot and time of their union; yet is no less delighted with that mystery, than with the thousand reflections and intricacies which attend it. What is the effect, when those ties are not suffered to exist? You every where distinguish the exact line of separation; the water is bounded by a distinct and uniform edge of grass; the grass by a similar edge of wood; the trees, and often the house, are distinctly placed upon the grass; all separated from whatever might group with them, or take off from their solitary insulated appearance: in every thing you trace the hand of a mechanic, not the mind of a liberal artist.

I will now proceed to the particulars, and will beg the reader to keep in his mind

mixed with the higher parts of speech: our pages would then be a good deal like our places, when all the conjunctions, prepositions, &c. were cleared away, and the nouns and verbs clumped by themselves.

the ruling principle I have just described, and of which I shall display the different proofs and examples.

No professor of high reputation seems for some time to have appeared after Kent, till at length, that the system might be carried to its *ne plus ultra* (no very distant point) arose the famous Mr. Brown; who has so fixed and determined the forms and lines of clumps, belts, and serpentine canals, and has been so steadily imitated by his followers, that had the improvers been incorporated, their common seal, with a clump, a belt, and a piece of made water, would have fully expressed the whole of their science, and have served them for a model as well as a seal*.

* What Ariosto says of a grove of cypresses, has always struck me in looking at made places,

—che parca d'una stampa tutte impresse.

They seem "cast in one mould, made in one frame;" so much so, that I have seen places on which large sums had been lavished, so completely out of harmony with the landscape around them, that they gave me the idea of having been made by contract in London, and then sent down in pieces, and put together on the spot.

It is very unfortunate that this great legislator of our national taste, whose laws still remain in force, should not have received from nature, or have acquired by education, more enlarged ideas. Claude Lorraine was bred a pastry-cook, but in every thing that regards his art as a painter, he had an elevated and comprehensive mind; nor in any part of his works can we trace the meanness of his original occupation. Mr. Brown was bred a gardener, and having nothing of the mind, or the eye of a painter, he formed his style (or rather his plan) upon the model of a parterre; and transferred its minute beauties, its little clumps, knots, and patches of flowers, the oval belt that surrounds it, and all its twists and crincum crancutis, to the great scale of nature*.

* This ingenious device of magnifying a parterre, calls to my mind a story I heard many years ago. A country parson, in the county where I live, speaking of a gentleman of low stature, but of extremely pompous manners, who had just left the company, exclaimed, in the simplicity and admiration of his heart, "quite grandeur in miniature, I protest!" This compliment reversed, would perfectly

We have, indeed, made but a poor progress, by changing the formal, but simple and majestic avenue, for the thin circular verge called a belt; and the unpretending ugliness of the strait, for the affected sameness of the serpentine canal: but the great distinguishing feature of modern improvement, is the *clump*; a name, which if the first letter were taken away, would most accurately describe its form and effect. Were it made the object of study how to invent something, which under the name of ornament should disfigure whole districts, nothing could be contrived to answer that purpose like a clump. Natural groups, being formed by trees of different ages and sizes, and at different distances from each other, often too by a mixture of those of the largest size with thorns, hollies, and others of inferior growth, are

suit the shreds and patches that are so often stuck about by Mr. Brown and his followers, amidst the noble scenes they disfigure; where they are as contemptible, and as much out of character, as Claude's first edifices in pasty would appear, in the dignified landscapes he has painted.

full of variety in their outlines; and from the same causes, no two groups are exactly alike. But clumps, from the trees being generally of the same age and growth, from their being planted nearly at the same distance in a circular form, and from each tree being equally pressed by his neighbour, are as like each other as so many puddings turned out of one common mould. Natural groups are full of openings and hollows; of trees advancing before, or retiring behind each other; all productive of intricacy, of variety, of deep shadows, and brilliant lights: in walking about them, the form changes at each step; new combinations, new lights and shades, new inlets present themselves in succession. But clumps, like compact bodies of soldiers, resist attacks from all quarters: examine them in every point of view; walk round and round them; no opening, no vacancy, no stragglers*! but in the true military character, *ils font face partout*.

* I remember hearing, that when Mr. Brown was High-Sheriff, some facetious person observing his attendants

The next leading feature to the clump in this circular system, and one which in romantic situations, rivals it in the power of creating deformity, is the belt. Its sphere, however, is more contracted. Clumps, placed like beacons on the summits of hills, alarm the picturesque traveller many miles off, and warn him of his approach to the enemy: the belt lies more in ambush; and the wretch who falls into it, and is obliged to walk the whole round in company with the improver, will allow that a snake with its tail in its mouth, is comparatively but a faint emblem of eternity. It has, indeed, all the sameness and formality of the avenue, to which it has succeeded, without any of its simple grandeur; for though in

straggling, called out to him, "Clump your javelin men." What was intended merely as a piece of ridicule, might have served as a very instructive lesson to the object of it; and have taught Mr. Brown, that such figures should be confined to bodies of men drilled for the purposes of formal parade, and not extended to the loose and airy shapes of vegetation.

an avenue you see the same objects from beginning to end, and in the belt a new set every twenty yards, yet each successive part of this insipid circle is so like the preceding, that though really different, the difference is scarcely felt; and there is nothing that so dulls, and at the same time so irritates the mind, as perpetual change without variety.

The avenue has a most striking effect, from the very circumstance of its being strait; no other figure can give that image of a grand gothic aisle with its natural columns and vaulted roof, the general mass of which fills the eye, while the particular parts insensibly steal from it in a long gradation of perspective*. The broad solemn shade adds a twilight calm to the

* By *long gradation*, I do not mean a great *length* of avenue; I perfectly agree with Mr. Burke, "that colonades and avenues of trees, of a moderate length, are without comparison far grander, than when they are suffered to run to immense distances."—*Sublime and Beautiful*, sect. x. p. 136.

whole, and makes it above all other places, most suited to meditation. To that also its straitness contributes; for when the mind is disposed to turn inwardly on itself, any serpentine line would distract the attention.

All the characteristic beauties of the avenue, its solemn stillness, the religious awe it inspires, are greatly heightened by moon-light. This I once very strongly experienced in approaching a venerable, castle-like mansion, built in the beginning of the 15th century: a few gleams had pierced the deep gloom of the avenue; a large massive tower at the end of it, seen through a long perspective, and half lighted by the uncertain beams of the moon, had a grand mysterious effect. Suddenly a light appeared in this tower—then as suddenly its twinkling vanished—and only the quiet, silvery rays of the moon prevailed; again, more lights quickly shifted to different parts of the building, and the whole scene most forcibly brought to my fancy the times of fairies and chivalry. I was

much hurt to learn from the master of the place, that I might take my leave of the avenue and its romantic effects, for that a death warrant was signed.

The destruction of so many of these venerable approaches, is a fatal consequence of the present excessive horror of strait lines. Sometimes, indeed, avenues do cut through the middle of very beautiful and varied ground, with which the stiffness of their form but ill accords, and where it were greatly to be wished they had never been planted; but being there, it may often be doubtful whether they ought to be destroyed. As to saving a few of the trees, I own I never saw it done with a good effect; they always pointed out the old line, and the spot was haunted by the ghost of the departed avenue. They are, however, not unfrequently planted, where a boundary of wood approaching to a strait line was required*; and in such situations

* At a gentleman's place in Cheshire, there is an avenue of oaks situated much in the manner I have described; Mr. Brown absolutely condemned it; but it now stands,

they furnish a walk of more perfect and continued shade than any other disposition of trees, and what is of no small consequence, they do not interfere with the rest of the place. There is in this last respect an essential difference between the avenue and the belt. When from the avenue you turn either to the right or to the left, the whole country, with all its intricacies and varieties, is open before you: but from the belt there is no escaping; it hems you in on all sides; and if you please yourself with having discovered some wild sequestered part (if such there ever be where a belt-maker has been admitted) or some new pathway, and are in the pleasing uncertainty whereabouts you are, and whither it will lead you, the belt soon appears, and the charm of expectation is over. If you turn to either side, it keeps winding round you; if you break through it, it

a noble monument of the triumph of the natural feelings of the owner, over the narrow and systematic ideas of a professed improver.

catches you at your return; and the idea of this distinct, unavoidable line of separation, damps all search after novelty. Far different from those magic circles of fairies and enchanters, that gave birth to splendid illusions, to the palaces and gardens of Alcina and Armida, this, like the ring of Angelica, instantly dissipates every illusion, every enchantment.

If ever a belt be allowable, it is where the house is situated in a dead flat, and in a naked ugly country; there at least it cannot injure any variety of ground, or exclude any distant prospect: it will also be the real boundary to the eye, however uniform, and any exclusion in such cases is a benefit; but where there is any play of ground, and a descent from the house, it more completely disfigures the place than any other improvement. What most delights us in the intricacy of varied ground, of swelling knolls, and of vallies between them, retiring from the sight in different directions amidst trees or thickets,

is, that according to Hogarth's expression, it leads the eye a kind of wanton chace; this is what he calls the *beauty* of intricacy, and is that which distinguishes what is produced by soft winding shapes, from the more sudden and quickly-varying kind, which arises from abrupt and rugged forms. All this wanton chace, as well as the effects of more wild and picturesque intricacy, is immediately checked by any circular plantation; which never appears to retire from the eye and lose itself in the distance, never admits of partial concealments. Whatever varieties of hills and dales there may be, such a plantation must stiffly cut across them, so that the undulations, and what in seamen's language may be called the *trending* of the ground, cannot in that case be hamoured; nor can its playful character be marked by that style of planting, which at once points out, and adds to its beautiful intricacy.

This may serve to shew how impossible it is to plan any forms of plantations that

will suit all places, however it may suit the professor's convenience to establish such a doctrine*.

I have perhaps expressed myself more strongly, and more at length than I otherwise should have done, on the subject of so paltry an invention as that of the belt, from the extreme disgust I felt at seeing its effect in a place, of which the general

* There is in this respect no small degree of resemblance between the art of gardening, and that of medicine, in which, after the general principles have been acquired, the judgment lies in the application; and every case (as an eminent physician observed to me) must be considered as a special case.

This holds precisely in improving, and in both arts the quacks are alike; they have no principles, but only a few nostrums, which they apply indiscriminately to all situations, and all constitutions. Clumps and Belts, pills and drops, are distributed with equal skill; the one plants the right, and clears the left, as the other bleeds the east, and purges the west ward. The best improver or physician, is he who leaves most to nature; who watches and takes advantage of those indications which she points out when left to exert her own powers, but which, when once destroyed or suppressed by an empiric of either kind, present themselves no more.

features are among the noblest in the kingdom. In front, the sea appears in view, embayed amidst islands and promontories, and backed by mountains; between the house and the shore, there is a quick, though not an abrupt descent of ground, on which a judicious improver might have planted different masses of wood, groups, and single trees, more or less dispersed or connected together, with lawns and glades between them, gently leading the eye among their intricacies to the shore. This would have formed a rich and varied foreground to the magnificent distance; and in the approach to the seaside, which ever way you took, would have broken that distance, and have formed in conjunction with it, a number of new and beautiful compositions. One of Mr. Brown's successors has thought differently; and this uncommon display of scenery is disgraced by a belt.

I do not remember the place in its unimproved state; but I was told that there

was a great quantity of wood between the house and the sea, and that the vessels appeared, as at that wonderful place, Mount Edgumbe, sailing over the tops, and gliding among the stems of the trees; if so, this professor

“Has left sad marks of his destructive sway.”

The method of thinning trees which has been adopted by layers out of ground, perfectly corresponds with their method of planting; for in both cases they totally neglect, what in the general sense of the word may be called picturesque effects. Trees of remarkable size, indeed, usually escape; but it is not sufficient to attend to the giant sons of the forest: often the loss of a few trees, nay of a single tree of middling size, is of infinite consequence to the general effect of the place, by making an irreparable breach in the outline of a principal wood; often some of the most beautiful groups, owe the playful variety of their form, and their happy connection

with other groups, to some apparently insignificant, and to many eyes, even ugly trees. To attend to all these niceties of outline, connection, and grouping, would require much time as well as skill, and therefore a more easy and compendious method has been adopted: the different groups are to be cleared round, till they become as clump-like as their untrained natures will allow; and even many of those outside trees which belong to the groups themselves, and to which they owe, not only their beauty, but their security against wind and frost, are cut down without pity, if they will not range according to a prescribed model; till mangled, starved, and cut off from all connection, these unhappy newly drilled corps

“Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves.”

Even the old avenue, whose branches had intertwined with each other for ages, must undergo this fashionable metamorphosis. The object of the improver is to

break its regularity; but so far from producing that effect by dividing it into clumps, he could scarcely invent a method by which its regularity would be made so manifest in every direction. When entire, its straitness can only be seen when you look up or down it; viewed sideways, it has the appearance of a thick mass of wood: if you plant other trees before it, to them it gives consequence, and they give it lightness and variety; but when it is divided, and you can see through it, and compare the separate clumps with the objects before and behind them, the strait line is apparent from whatever point you view it. In its close array, the avenue is like the Grecian phalanx: each tree, like each soldier, is firmly wedged in between its companions; its branches, like their spears, present a front impenetrable to all attacks; but the moment this compact order is broken, their sides become naked and exposed. Mr. Brown, like another Paulus Æmilius, has broken the firm embodied ranks of many a noble phalanx of

trees, and in this, perhaps, more than in any other instance, he has shewn how far the perversion of taste may be carried; for at the very time when he deprived the avenue of its shade and its solemn grandeur, he increased its formality.

CHAPTER II.

IT is in the arrangement and management of trees, that the great art of improvement consists: earth is too cumbrous and lumpish for man to contend much with, and when worked upon, its effects are flat and dead like its nature. But trees, detaching themselves at once from the surface, and rising boldly into the air, have a more lively and immediate effect on the eye: they alone, form a canopy over us, and a varied frame to all other objects; which they admit, exclude, and group with, almost at the will of the improver. In

tersccted by walks and green alleys all edged and bordered, that there is no escaping from them; they act like flappers in Laputa, and instantly wake you from any dream of retirement.

The borders of these walks are so thickly planted, and the rest of the wood so impracticable, that it seems as if the improver said, "You shall never wander from my walks; never exercise your own taste and judgment, never form your own compositions; neither your eyes nor your feet shall be allowed to stray from the boundaries I have traced:" a species of thralldom unfit for a free country.

There is, indeed, something despotic in the general system of improvement; all must be laid open; all that obstructs, levelled to the ground; houses, orchards, gardens, all swept away. *Painting*, on the contrary, tends to humanize the mind: where a despot thinks every person an intruder who enters his domain, and wishes to destroy cottages and pathways, and to reign alone, the lover of painting, considers the dwellings, the inhabitants, and the

marks of their intercourse, as ornaments to the landscape*.

For the honour of humanity there *are* minds, which require no other motive than what passes within. And here I cannot resist paying a tribute to the memory of a beloved uncle, and recording a benevolence towards all the inhabitants around him, that struck me from my earliest remembrance; and it is an impression I wish always to cherish. It seemed as if he had made his extensive walks as much for them as for himself; they used them as freely, and their enjoyment was his. The

* Sir Joshua Reynolds told me, that when he and Wilson the landscape painter were looking at the view from Richmond terrace, Wilson was pointing out some particular part; and in order to direct his eye to it, "There," said he, "near those houses---there! where the *figures* are."---Though a painter, said Sir Joshua, I was puzzled: I thought he meant statues, and was looking upon the *tops* of the houses; for I did not at first conceive that the men and women we plainly saw walking about, were by him only thought of as figures in the landscape.

village bore as strong marks of his and of his brother's attentions (for in that respect they appeared to have but one mind) to the comforts and pleasures of its inhabitants. Such attentive kindnesses are amply repaid by affectionate regard and reverence; and were they general throughout the kingdom, they would do much more towards guarding us against democratical opinions,

“ Than twenty thousand soldiers arm'd in proof.”

The cheerfulness of the scene I have mentioned, and all the interesting circumstances attending it, so different from those of solitary grandeur, have convinced me, that he who destroys dwellings, gardens, and inclosures, for the sake of mere extent and parade of property, only extends the bounds of monotony, and of dreary selfish pride; but contracts those of variety, amusement, and humanity.

I own it does surprise me, that in an age and in a country where the arts are so

highly cultivated, one single plan, and such a plan, should have been so generally adopted; and that even the love of peculiarity should not sometimes have checked this method of levelling all distinctions, of making all places alike*; all equally tame and insipid.

Few persons have been so lucky as never to have seen or heard the true *proser*; smiling, and distinctly uttering his flowing common-place nothings, with the same placid countenance, the same even-toned voice: he is the very emblem of serpentine walks, belts, and rivers, and all Mr. Brown's works; like him they are smooth, flowing, even, and distinct; and like him they wear one's soul out.

There is a very different being of a much rarer kind, who hardly appears to be of the same species; full of unexpected

* A person, well known for his taste and abilities, being at a gentleman's house where Mr. Brown was expected, drew a plan by anticipation; which proved so exact, that I believe the ridicule it threw on the serious plan, helped to prevent its execution.

turns, of flashes of light: objects the most familiar, are placed by him in such singular, yet natural points of view; he strikes out such unthought-of agreements and contrasts; such combinations, so little obvious, yet never forced nor affected, that the attention cannot flag; but from the delight of what is passed, we eagerly listen for what is to come. This is the true picturesque, and the propriety of that term will be more felt, if we attend to what corresponds to the *beautiful* in conversation. How different is the effect of that soft insinuating style, of those gentle transitions, which, without dazzling or surprising, keep up an increasing interest, and insensibly wind round the heart.

It is only by a habit of observation added to natural sensibility, that we learn to distinguish what is really beautiful, from what is merely smooth and flowing, and to give a decided preference to the former: by the same means also we gain a true relish for the picturesque in visible objects, and likewise for what in some measure

answers to it,—the quick, lively and sudden turns of fancy in conversation. I have sometimes seen a *proser* quite forlorn in the company of a man of brilliant imagination; he seemed “dazzled with excess of light,” his dull faculties totally unable to keep pace with the other’s rapid ideas. I have afterwards observed the same man get close to a brother *proser*; and the two snails have travelled on so comfortably upon their own slime, that they seemed to feel no more impression either of pleasure or envy from what they had heard, than a real snail may be supposed to do, at the active bounds and leaps of a stag, or of a high-mettled courser.

This is exactly the case with that practical *proser*, the true improver: carry him to a scene merely picturesque, he is bewildered with its variety and intricacy, the charms of which he neither relishes nor comprehends; and longs to be crawling among his clumps, and debating about the tenth part of an inch in the turn of a gra-

vel walk. The mass of improvers seem indeed to forget that we are distinguished from other animals, by being

“ Nobler far, of look erect ;”

they go about

“ With leaden eye that loves the ground,”

and are so continually occupied with turns and sweeps, and manœuvring stakes, that they never gain an idea of the first elements of composition.

Such a mechanical system of operations little deserves the name of an art. There are indeed certain words in all languages that have a good and a bad sense ; such as *simplicity* and *simple*, *art* and *artful*, which as often express our contempt as our admiration. It seems to me, that whenever art, with regard to plan or disposition, is used in a good sense, it means to convey an idea of some degree of invention ; of contrivance that is not obvious ; of something that raises expectation, and which differs with success from what we

recollect having seen before. With regard to improving, that alone I should call art in a good sense, which was employed in collecting from the infinite varieties of *accident* (which is commonly called *nature*, in opposition to what is called *art*) such circumstances as may happily be introduced, according to the *real* capabilities of the place to be improved. This is what painters have done in their art ; and thence it is, that many of these lucky accidents being strongly pointed out by them, are called *picturesque*.

He therefore, in my mind, will shew most art in improving, who *leaves* (a very material point) or who creates the greatest variety of landscapes ; that is of such different compositions as painters will least wish to alter : not he who begins his work by general clearing and smoothing, or in other words, by destroying all those accidents of which such advantages might have been made ; but which afterwards, the most enlightened and experienced artist can never hope to restore.

When I hear how much has been done

by art in a place of large extent, in no one part of which, where that art has been busy, a painter would take out his sketch-book ; when I see the sickening display of that art, such as it is, and the total want of effect—I am tempted to reverse the sense of the famous line of Tasso, and to say of such performances,

L'arte che nulla fa, tutta si scopre.

APPENDIX.

GREAT part of my essay was written, before I saw that of Mr. Gilpin on picturesque beauty. I had gained so much information on that subject from his other works that I read it with extreme eagerness, on account of the interest I took in the subject itself, as well as from my opinion of the author. At first I thought my work had been anticipated ; I was pleased, however, to find some of my ideas confirmed, and was in hopes of seeing many new lights struck out. But as I advanced, that distinction between the two characters, that line of separation which I thought would have been accurately marked out, became less and less visible ; till at length