

ARCHITECTURE AND GARDENS

Henry Home (1696–1782), Lord Kames

1762

...But gardening possesses one advantage which can be equaled by in the other arts. A garden may be so contrived as in various scenes to raise successively all its different emotions. But to operate this delicious effect, the garden must be extensive so as to admit a slow succession. For a small garden, comprehended at one view, ought to be confined to one expression. It may be gay, it may be sweet, it may be gloomy, but an attempt to mix these would create a jumble of emotions not a little unpleasant. For the same reason, a building, even the most magnificent, is necessarily confined to one expression.

Architecture, considered as a fine art, instead of rivaling gardening in its progress toward perfection, seems not far advanced beyond its infant state. To bring it to maturity, two things mainly are wanted. First, a greater variety of parts and ornaments than it seems provided with. Gardening here has the advantage; it is provided with such plenty and such variety of materials that it must be the fault of the artist if the spectator be not entertained with different scenes and affected with various emotions.

But materials in architecture are so scanty that artists hitherto have not been successful in raising emotions other than those of beauty and grandeur. With respect to the former, there are indeed plenty of means—regularity, order, symmetry, simplicity; and with respect to the latter, addition of size is sufficient. But though it be evident that every building ought to have a certain character or expression suitable to its destination, yet this is a refinement which artists have scarce ventured upon. A death's head and bones employed in monumental buildings will indeed produce an emotion of gloom and melancholy, but every ornament of this kind, if these can be termed so, ought to be rejected because they are in themselves disagreeable.

The other thing wanted to bring the art to perfection is to ascertain the precise impression made by every single part and ornament—cupolas, spires, columns, carvings, statues, vases, etc. For in vain will an artist attempt rules for employing these, either singly or in combination, until the different emotions or feelings they produce be distinctly explained. Gardening in this particular has also the advantage. The several emotions raised by trees, rivers, cascades, plains, eminences, and other materials it employs are understood, and the nature of each can be described with some degree of precision, which is done occasionally in the foregoing parts of this work.

In gardening as well as in architecture, simplicity ought to be the governing taste. Profuse ornament has no better effect than to confound the eye and to prevent the object from making an impression as one entire whole. An artist destitute of genius for capital beauties is naturally prompted to supply the defect by crowding his plan with slight embellishments. Hence in gardens triumphal arches, Chinese houses, temples, obelisks, cascades, and fountains without end; and hence in buildings pillars, vases, statues, and a profusion of carved work. Thus a woman who has no just taste is apt to overcharge every part of her dress with ornament. Superfluity of decoration has another bad effect; it gives the object a diminutive look. An island in a wide extended lake makes it appear larger; but an artificial lake, which must always be little, appears still less by making an island in it.

In forming plans for embellishing a field, an artist void of taste deals in straight lines, circles, and squares because these show best upon paper. He perceives not that to humour and adorn nature is the perfection of his art, and that nature, neglecting regularity, reaches superior beauties by distributing her objects in great variety with a bold hand. A large field laid out with strict regularity is stiff and artificial. Nature indeed, in organized bodies comprehended under one view studies regularity, which, for the same reason, ought to be studied in architecture. But in large objects, which cannot otherwise be surveyed than in parts and by succession, regularity and uniformity would be useless properties because they cannot be discovered by the eye. Nature therefore, in her large works, neglects these properties, and in copying nature the artist ought to neglect them.

Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (Edinburgh: Kincaid and Bell, 1762), III:297–301