



The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Being The Second of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

XIV. A description of a grotto.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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L E T T E R X I V .

Twick'nam, June 2, 1725.

YOU shew yourself a just man and a friend in those guesses and suppositions you make at the possible reasons of my silence; every one of which is a true one. As to forgetfulness of you or yours, I assure you, the promiscuous conversations of the town serve only to put me in mind of better, and more quiet, to be had in a corner of the world (undisturb'd, innocent, serene, and sensible) with such as you. Let no access of any distrust make you think of me differently in a cloudy day from what you do in the most sunshiny weather. Let the young ladies be assured I make nothing new in my gardens without wishing to see the print of their fairy steps in every part of them. I have put the last hand to my works of this kind, in happily finishing the subterraneous way and grotto: I there found a spring of the clearest water, which falls in a perpetual rill, that echoes thro' the cavern day and night. From the river Thames, you see thro' my arch up a walk of the wilderness, to a kind of open Temple, wholly compos'd of shells in the rustic manner; and from that distance under the temple you look down thro' a sloping arcade of trees,
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and see the sails on the river passing suddenly and vanishing, as thro' a perspective glass. When you shut the doors of this grotto, it becomes on the instant, from a luminous room, a *Camera obscura*; on the walls of which all the objects of the river, hills, woods, and boats, are forming a moving picture in their visible radiations: and when you have a mind to light it up, it affords you a very different scene; it is finished with shells interspersed with pieces of looking-glass in angular forms; and in the ceiling is a star of the same material, at which when a lamp (of an orbicular figure of thin alabaster) is hung in the middle, a thousand pointed rays glitter, and are reflected over the place. There are connected to this grotto by a narrower passage two porches, one towards the river of smooth stones full of light, and open; the other toward the Garden shadow'd with trees, rough with shells, flints, and iron-ore. The bottom is paved with simple pebble, as is also the adjoining walk up the wilderness to the temple, in the natural taste, agreeing not ill with the little dripping murmur, and the aquatic idea of the whole place. It wants nothing to complete it but a good statue with an inscription, like that beautiful antique one which you know I am so fond of,

*Hujus Nympha loci, sacri custodia fontis,
 Dormio, dum blandæ sentio murmur aquæ.
 Parce meum, quisquis tangis cava marmora,
 somnum
 Rumpere; si bibas, sive lavere, tace.*

Nymph of the grot, these sacred springs I keep,
 And to the murmur of these waters sleep;
 Ah spare my slumbers, gently tread the cave!
 And drink in silence, or in silence lave!

You'll think I have been very poetical in this description, but it is pretty near the truth^a. I wish you were here to bear testimony how little it owes to Art, either the place itself, or the image I give of it. I am, &c.

L E T T E R X V .

Sept. 13, 1725.

I Should be ashamed to own the receipt of a very kind of letter from you, two whole months from the date of this; if I were not

^a He had greatly enlarged and improved this Grotto not long before his death: and, by incrusting it about with a vast number of ores and minerals of the richest and rarest kinds, had made it one of the most elegant and romantic retirements that was any where to be seen. He has made it the subject of a very pretty poem of a singular cast and composition.

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