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Of the Rise, Progress, and present State of Gardening in Switzerland

J. C. Loudons Bericht über schweizerische Gärten aus dem Jahre 1835

Description des jardins suisses, par J. C. Loudon (1835)

86 John Claudius Loudon (1783–1843), ein von Haus aus schottischer Gartengestalter, war wohl der vornehmste Vertreter des «Picturesque» Stils in England im frühen 19. Jahrhundert. Er unternahm mehrere Reisen auf dem Kontinent und beschrieb auch schweizerische Gärten in seinen Publikationen, unter anderem in der 1835 in London erschienenen Neuauflage seiner «Encyclopaedia of Gardening». Da es recht wenige Beschreibungen über schweizerische Gärten aus jener Zeit gibt und das Werk schwer auffindbar ist, veröffentlichen wir hier Loudons Text fast vollständig, lediglich einen dem Garten von Voltaire in Ferney gewidmeten Abschnitt haben wir weggelassen. Loudon interessierte sich persönlich sehr für Dendrologie, und es sei hier darauf hingewiesen, dass es im ersten Band seines 1844 postum publizierten «Arboretum and Fruticetum Britannicum» ein längeres Kapitel über «Indigenous and Forest Trees and Shrubs of Switzerland» gibt. Es enthält auch mehrere Hinweise auf bemerkenswerte Bäume in westschweizerischen Gartenanlagen. Hinweise zur Lokalisierung des abgebildeten Gartenplans und des Pavillons nimmt die Redaktion der «Mitteilungen» gerne entgegen.

John Claudius Loudon (1783–1843), créateur écossais de jardins, fut probablement le plus éminent représentant du jardin «pittoresque», au début du XIX siècle, en Angleterre. Il entreprit plusieurs voyages sur le continent et publia de nombreux ouvrages. L'édition de 1835 de son «Encyclopaedia of Gardening», parue à Londres, contient une description des jardins suisses. Les descriptions de jardins suisses de cette époque étant rares et l'ouvrage de Loudon difficile d'accès, nous publions ici le texte original dans son intégralité, excepté un passage concernant le jardin de Voltaire à Ferney que nous avons coupé. Nous signalons par ailleurs que Loudon, qui portait un grand intérêt à la dendrologie, a consacré un chapitre aux «Indigenous and Forest Trees and Shrubs of Switzerland» dans le premier volume de son «Arboretum and Fruticetum Britannicum», paru en 1844, après sa mort. Cet ouvrage contient également des observations sur les arbres les plus remarquables des jardins romands. La rédaction sera heureuse de recueillir tout renseignement utile à l'identification et à la localisation du plan et du pavillon illustrés dans le texte.

E.R.

«Extensive gardens are not to be expected in a country of comparative equalisation of property, like Switzerland; but nowhere are gardens more profitably managed, or more neatly kept, than in that country. «Nature», Hirschfeld observes, «has been liberal to the inhabitants of Switzerland, and they have wisely profited from it. Almost all the gardens are theatres of true beauty, without vain ornaments or artificial decorations. Convenience, not magnificence, reigns in the country-houses; and the villas are distinguished more by their romantic and picturesque situations, than by their architecture.» He mentions several gardens near Geneva and Lausanne; Délices is chiefly remarkable because it was inhabited by Voltaire before he purchased Ferney, and La Grange and La Boissier are to this day well-known places. Ferney is still eagerly visited by every stranger; but neither it, nor the château of the Neckar family, nor those of the Empress Josephine, Beauharnois, and others, eulogised in the local guides, present

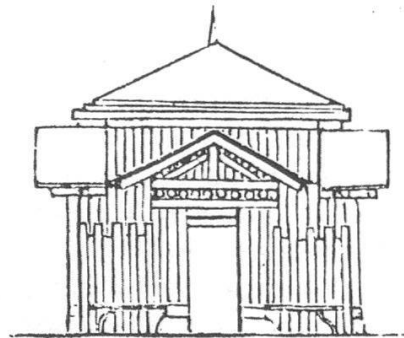


fig. 1

any thing in the way of our art particularly deserving of notice; though their situations, looking down on so magnificent a lake, the simplicity of their architecture, and the romantic scenery by which they are surrounded, render them delightful retirements, and such as but few countries can boast. The villa-gardens excel in rustic buildings (fig. 1) and arbours; and are, for the most part, a mixture of orchards on hilly surfaces, cultivated spots, and rocks. However insignificant such grounds may look on paper (fig. 2), in the reality they are pleasing and ro-

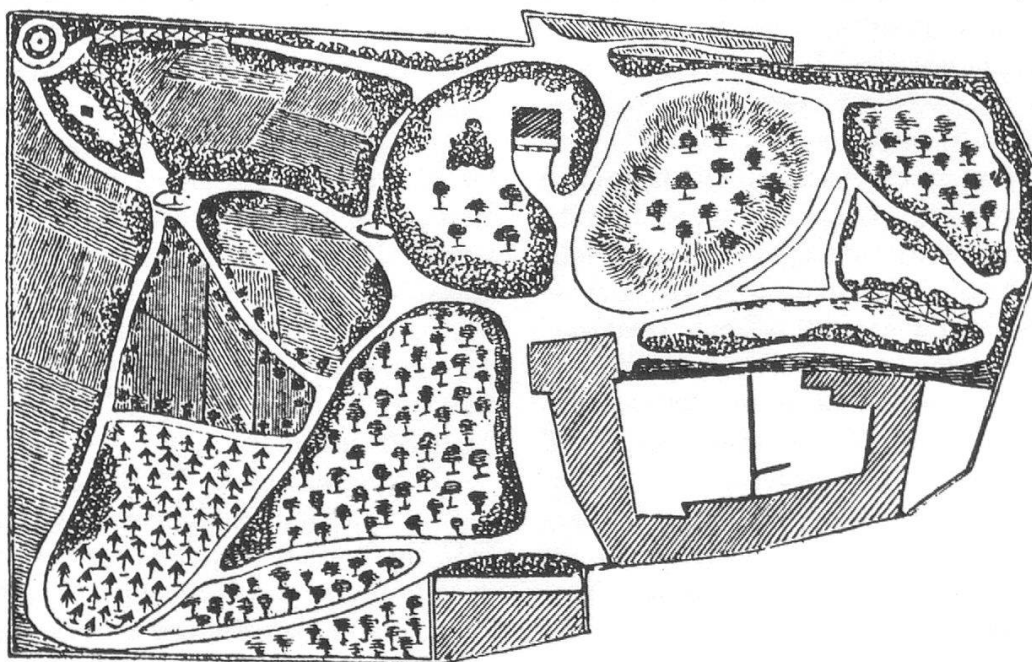


fig. 2

mantic. The public promenades at Berne are most beautiful, and kept with all the care of an English flower-garden. In the capitals of the other cantons, public gardens are either of much smaller extent, or altogether wanting. Indeed, in a country abounding in picturesque scenery, and common pastures, and parochial forests, limited spaces for recreation are altogether uncalled for. Who that is free to climb the rocks, or the grassy steeps, or even to walk along the highways, in such a country, would desire to be confined to enclosures in or about towns? Switzerland has the peculiar advantage of producing a close turf, which, in most places, and particularly at Lausanne and Berne, is as verdant as in England. Harte says that great part of the Pays de Vaud is like the best part of Berkshire; and, indeed, every one feels that this is the country most congenial to an Englishman's taste and feelings.

Gibbon's house and garden, at Lausanne: The mansion, as Gibbon tells us himself, «was spacious and convenient, connected on the north side with the city» (that is, in a narrow street), «and open on the south to a beautiful and boundless horizon. A pleasure-ground of four acres was laid out by the taste of M. Deyverdun. From the garden, a rich scenery of meadows and vineyards descend to the Leman lake; and the prospects, stretching far beyond the lake, are crowned by the stupendous mountains of Savoy.» The house and grounds are now occupied by a rich banker; but there is no appearance that his riches, since Gibbon's death, have been bestowed upon either. Nature has preserved the terrace, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains; but the summer-house at the end of it, where Gibbon composed the last page of his history, is now a forlorn room, the repository of broken earthenware and fragments of worthless refuse.

The first botanic garden which appeared in Switzerland was that of the celebrated Conrad Gesner, at Zurich, founded before the middle of the sixteenth century. He had not, Deleuze observes, sufficient fortune to obtain much ground, or to maintain many gardeners; but his activity supplied every thing, and he assembled in a small spot what he had been able to procure by his numerous travels and extensive correspondence. Public gardens were, in the end of this century, established at Geneva, Bâle, and Berne, and, subsequently, in most of the cantons. The first of these gardens at present is that of Geneva, lately enlarged and newly arranged, under the direction of that active and highly valued botanist, De Candolle. The garden of Bâle is rich in the plants of all the mountainous regions which lie around it, including the Tyrol and Piedmont. A taste for flowers is perhaps more popular in Switzerland than in Germany, for though frugality is not less an object in every branch of rural economy, yet real independence is more general; a poor man here has generally some little spot that he can call his own, and which he delights to cultivate and ornament. Speaking of Zurich, Simond observes «Harlaem excepted, there is not a town where more attention is paid to fine flowers: many new plants, as the Horténsia (*Hydrangea horténsis*), Volkaméria, &c., are here grown in perfection. The taste for flowers is particularly displayed on the occasion of the birth of a child. When the news is carried about to all the relations and friends of the family, the maid is dressed in her best attire, and carries a huge nosegay of the finest flowers the season affords.»

The botanic garden at Bâle was visited by Murray, author of a «Glance at Switzerland», in 1827. He found it of limited dimensions, with a small pond for aquatics, which contained a jet-d'eau, and was surrounded by rockwork, cover-

ed with alpine plants. What he thought most worthy of remark were, the *Arúndo Dònax*, fifteen feet high, and two fine specimens of *Cè-reus heptagònus*, one in flower, fourteen feet high. They stood as sentinels at the entrance, and had always been exposed.

Horticulture is carefully practised in Switzerland; vineyards are formed as far north as Lausanne; and the apple, pear, plum, cherry, and walnut are common on every farm; the first three are in every cottage-garden. The filbert, gooseberry, currant, raspberry, and strawberry are natives; but only the filbert, raspberry, and strawberry are common in the woods and copses. In the sheltered valleys of this country, the apple and the pear are most prolific. Stewed pears is a common dish among the cottagers in autumn; the fruit is also dried, and, in winter, forms an excellent soup ingredient. The cabbage, the potato, the white beet, grown for the leaves as spinach and their footstalks as chard, and the kidneybean for haricots and soups, are the popular vegetables. Particular attention is paid to bees, which are kept in neat rustic sheds, (fig. 3) or have their hives carefully thatched with bark or moss.

Horticulture in the neighbourhood of Geneva, Duppa observes, «is not good, and the

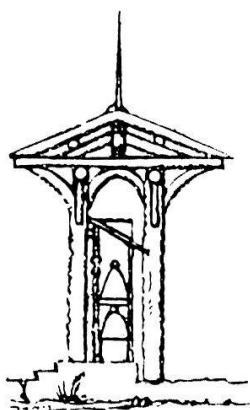


fig. 3

fruits and vegetables are, in general, very inferior to those of England; not but that I have occasionally seen excellent vegetables and fruits, which show that there is nothing hostile in the soil or climate, but there is a deficiency of care or skill in the cultivation. In this opinion I was confirmed by Sir Thomas Maitland, a name I mention with the greatest respect and esteem, who was an old and very experienced visitor at Geneva, and sufficiently partial to Switzerland to insure his opinions from any unfavourable bias.»

There is little or no forest planting in Switzerland, but hedges of hawthorn are not unfrequent. The walnut is there a very common high-road tree, and in the autumnal months furnishes the pauper traveller with the principal part of his food. Poor Italians have been known to travel from Naples and Venice to Geneva on this sort of fare. They begin with Indian corn and grapes, which they steal from the fields, till they arrive at Milan, and the rest of the road they depend on walnuts, filberts, and apples.

The *Pinus Cembra*, Cembra Pine, Apher-nousli Pine, Siberian Stone Pine, or Siberian Cedar (fig. 4) is one of the most useful trees in Switzerland. It is, indeed, of very slow growth; one of these trees, cut down when nineteen inches in diameter, displayed 353 concentric circles. Its usual growth is a span in height in six years. The timber of the Cembran Pine has a most agreeable perfume, and is much used for domestic utensils, as well as for wainscoting rooms. A traveller, who visited the château of Tarasp, was struck, in almost every apartment, with the perfume of this wood; and he remarks it as a surprising and inexplicable circumstance, that the wood should have exhaled this perfume for some centuries in undiminished strength, and without the wood itself having suffered any decrease of weight. But this wood possesses an-

other recommendation: rooms wainscoted with it are not infested with bugs or moths. Its seeds are esteemed a delicacy: they are eaten in great quantities at the winter parties; and on those occasions, it is said, the fair sex display, in extracting them, a degree of skill, mixed with much innocent gaiety and vivacity. This species of pine is becoming very rare in the Alps. In order to expedite and secure its growth, and thus remove the principal objection to its cultivation, the seeds should be deposited in a compost of earth, and of the clippings and leaves of the pinaster

and the larch; or this compost should be put around the roots of the young plants. The larch is a valuable tree, not only for the purpose of forming manure, but also for its durable timber. This lasts four times longer than pine timber grown at the same elevation. If, therefore, the larch were planted where the pine now grows, it is evident that much forest ground might be gained and applied to pasture. The foliage of these and other trees is carefully collected on the mountains for winter fodder, put into large nets, and then hurled down into the valleys.»

